

ALL MY SONS

BY ARTHUR MILLER

Study Guide

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VIRGINIA
STAGE
COMPANY
EDUCATION
PROGRAMS
2015-2016

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Virginia SOLs Covered:

Theater Arts I: TI.11, TI.12, TI.13, TI.14, TI.15, TI.16, TI.17, TI.18

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OUR MISSION

Virginia Stage Company connects the Hampton roads community through educational and community engagement initiatives that enrich lives and encourage artists and audiences for the future. Our offerings are based on our core values of quality, diversity, and community. As an integral component of VSC’s mission, our education and community programming strives to reflect the needs of the communities we serve, to advocate for arts integration and experiences that promote literacy, character development, and critical thinking. We hope to inspire participants to transform the way they examine the world through programs that are accessible to all people and to develop the next generation of artists and audiences.

FOR MORE INFO:

www.vastage.org/education

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM VSC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

OUR TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

We've witnessed firsthand what the creative process nurtures in children, teens, and all lifelong learners:

- Excitement, enthusiasm, and openness to explore their own creativity
- critical-thinking skills and problem solving
- enthusiasm for teamwork
- empathy and support toward peers
- strength in their ability to listen and express themselves effectively
- healthy self-image and awareness

Because it has such positive and far-reaching outcomes for our students, VSC's education model emphasizes process over product. We believe that students will emerge from their time with VSC's educational programs with skills that will serve them well in all areas of life.

BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS

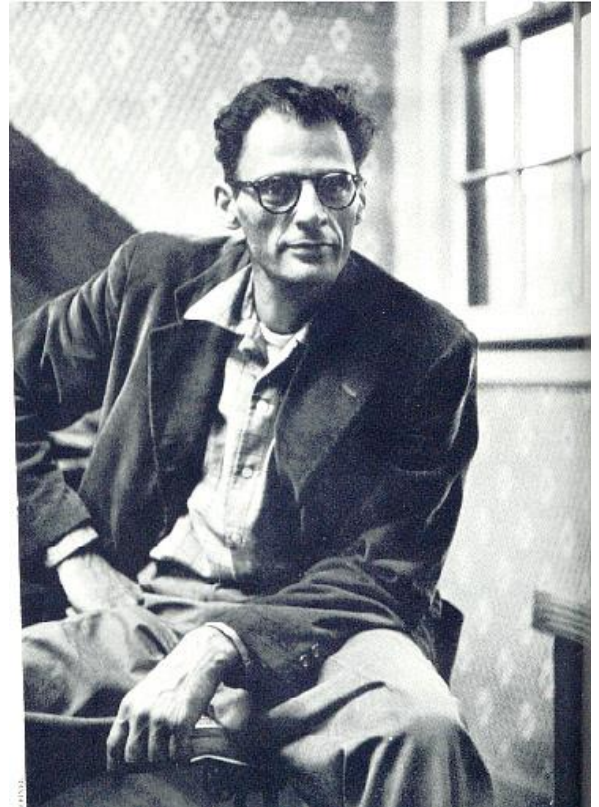
Students enrolled in VSC's education programs will:

- develop leadership qualities
- enhance communication skills
- develop an appreciation for the creative process
- learn to take ownership of their own ideas and concepts
- increase their knowledge of theater terms
- develop greater confidence through the creative play experience
- develop a spirit of curiosity
- learn to develop and appreciate the value of kindness
- develop or expand spatial awareness
- use dramatic prompts to create imaginative movement
- cooperate with other in group sessions
- learn how to use voice safely and effectively
- learn how to use their bodies effectively with character development
- work with peers to write scripts
- explore characters and settings
- rehearse in a positive, supportive environment
- practice respectful critique of others' work
- put it all together to create original theater for others

A Brief Biography: Arthur Miller

Quick Facts

Born: October 17, 1915 in Harlem, New York
Died: February 10, 2005 in Roxbury, Connecticut
Parents: Isidore and Augusta Miller
Marriages: Mary Grace Slattery, 1940 (divorced, 1956); Marilyn Monroe, 1956 (divorced, 1961); Ingeborg Morath, 1962.
Children: (first marriage) Jane Ellen, Robert Arthur; (third marriage) Rebecca Augusta, Daniel.

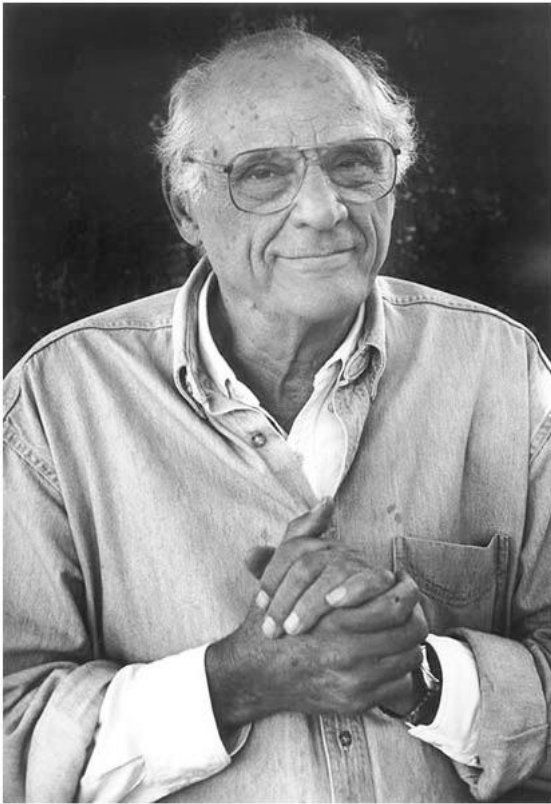


Arthur Asher Miller, the son of a women's clothing company owner, was born in 1915 in New York City. His father lost his business in the Depression and the family was forced to move to a smaller home in Brooklyn. After graduating from high school, Miller worked jobs ranging from radio singer to truck driver to clerk in an automobile-parts warehouse. Miller began writing plays as a student at the University of Michigan, joining the Federal Theater Project in New York City after he received his degree. His first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, opened in 1944 and his next play, *All My Sons*, received the Drama Critics' Circle Award. His 1949 *Death of a Salesman* won the Pulitzer Prize.

In 1956 and 1957, Miller was subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee and was convicted of contempt of Congress for his refusal to identify writers believed to hold Communist sympathies. The following year, the United States Court of Appeals overturned the conviction. In 1959 the National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded him the Gold Medal for Drama. Miller was married three times: to Mary Grace Slattery in 1940, Marilyn Monroe in 1956, and photographer Inge Morath in 1962.

Among his works are *A View from the Bridge*, *The Misfits*, *After the Fall*, *Incident at Vichy*, *The Price*, *The American Clock*, *Broken Glass*, *Mr. Peters' Connections*, and *Timebends*, his autobiography. Miller's writing earned him a lifetime of honors, including the Pulitzer Prize, seven Tony Awards, two Drama Critics Circle Awards, an

Obie, an Olivier, the John F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Dorothy and Lillian Gish prize. He holds honorary doctorate degrees from Oxford University and Harvard University.



Throughout his life and work, Miller remained socially engaged and has written with conscience, clarity, and compassion. As Chris Keller says to his mother in *All My Sons*, "Once and for all you must know that there's a universe of people outside, and you're responsible to it." Miller's work is infused with his sense of responsibility to humanity and to his audience. "The playwright is nothing without his audience," he wrote. "He is one of the audience who happens to know how to speak."

--Rachel Galvin

Biography adapted from

<http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/miller/biography.html>.

Miller's Extensive Body of Work

1936 – Miller writes his first play, *No Villain*, in a playwriting class at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He wins the prestigious Avery Hopwood Award for excellence in writing.

1938-1944 – Miller joins the Federal Theatre Project and begins to write radio plays, some of which are broadcast on CBS.

1944 – *The Man Who Had All the Luck* opens on Broadway to disappointing reviews and closes after only four performances.

1945 – Miller writes *Focus*, a novel about an anti-Semite who is mistaken for a Jew.

1947 – *All My Sons* (directed by Elia Kazan) premieres on Broadway to rave reviews.

1949 – The opening of *Death of a Salesman* solidifies Miller's place in the American theatrical and literary canons.

1949 – Miller publishes his famed essay *The Tragedy of the Common Man* in the New York Times.

1950 – Miller adapts Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, another play that confronts themes of communal and social responsibility.

1953 – *The Crucible* opens on Broadway, sparking governmental suspicion about Miller's "un-American" lifestyle.

1955 – *A View from the Bridge* opens on Broadway, introducing audiences to yet another tragic Miller character: Eddie Carbone.

1961 – Miller writes the screenplay for *The Misfits*, based on his short story. The movie stars Clark Gable and Marilyn Monroe, Miller's wife.

1967 – Miller publishes *I Don't Need You Anymore*, a collection of short stories.

1968 – *The Price* opens on Broadway; it is a play that boldly confronts themes of materialism and class.

1969 – Miller publishes *In Russia* with photographer wife Inge Morath, detailing their impressions of Russian culture during The Cold War.

1970 – Miller writes *Fame*, a television play about a playwright troubled by his success.

1972 – *The Creation of the World and Other Business*, a play inspired by the book of Genesis, is considered Miller's first commercial failure since *The Man Who Had All the Luck* in 1944.

1977 – With his wife, Miller publishes *In the Country*. The book is a series of photographs by Morath with text written by Miller on their life in Roxbury, Connecticut.

1980 – *The American Clock* opens on Broadway, featuring characters loosely based on Miller's family.

1984 – Miller publishes '*Salesman*' in *Beijing*, detailing the insights and challenges of directing a decidedly American play in a foreign country.

1987 – Miller publishes his autobiography, *Timebends: A Life*.

1990 – Miller writes the screenplay for a detective film entitled *Everybody Wins*. The film receives dreadful reviews, but Miller's reputation remains untarnished.

1994 – *Broken Glass*, a play based on the Jewish pogrom in Nazi Germany, premieres at the Long Wharf Theatre in Connecticut; it later wins a Tony Award for Best Play.

1996 – Miller writes the screenplay for *The Crucible*.

2002 – *Resurrection Blues*, Miller's biting comedy about religious dogma, premieres at The Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis.

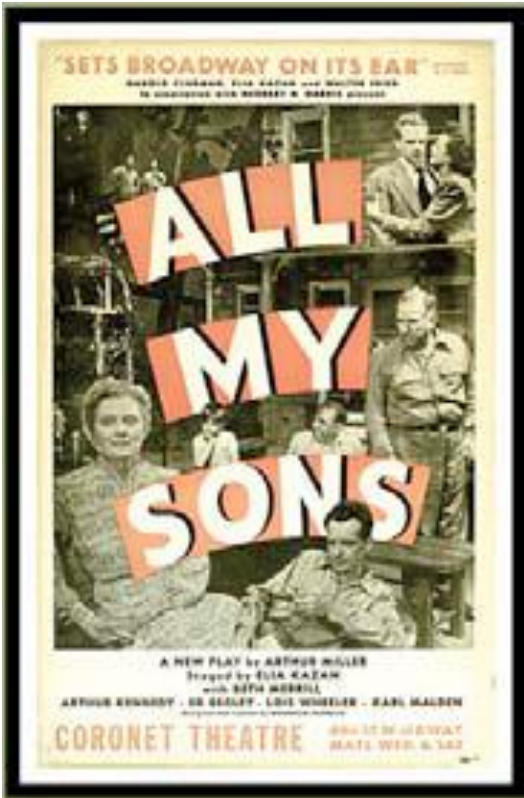
2004 – Miller's final play, *Finishing the Picture*, premieres at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago just months before his death. The play is a dramatization of his time shooting the movie *The Misfits*, with then-wife Marilyn Monroe.

All My Sons Set Design Concepts



All My Sons Production History

All My Sons opened on Broadway at the Coronet Theatre in New York City on Jan. 29, 1947, and closed Nov. 8, 1947. The show, which starred Ed Begley, Beth Miller, Arthur Kennedy, and Karl Malden, ran for 328 performances. It was directed by Elia Kazan (to whom it is dedicated). It won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, beating Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. 1947 also was the year that the Tony Awards were established, and the play won the first awards for Author and Director.



Other Notable Productions

1987 – A major Broadway revival with Richard Kiley (Joe Keller), Joyce Ebert (Kate Keller) and Jamey Sheridan (Chris Keller) wins a Tony for Best Revival. In addition, Kiley is nominated in the Actor (Play) category and Sheridan is nominated in the Actor (Featured Role – Play) category.

1997 – The Roundabout mounts a 50th Anniversary production, starring John Cullum as Joe Keller and directed by Barry Edelstein.

2002 – The Guthrie Theatre's production is directed by Artistic Director Joe Dowling

2008 – The latest Broadway revival features John Lithgow (Joe), Dianne Wiest (Kate), Patrick Wilson (Chris) and Katie Holmes (Ann Deever).

Film, Radio and TV Adaptations

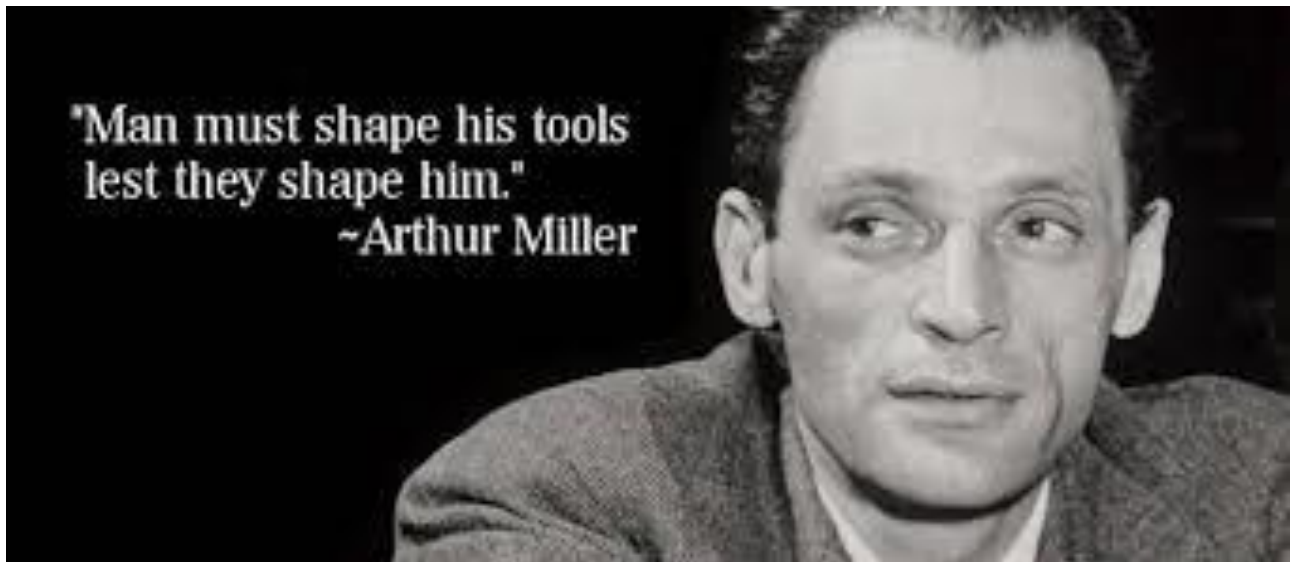
The first film adaptation of *All My Sons* came in 1948. The major roles were played by Edward G. Robinson (Joe Keller), Burt Lancaster (Chris Keller), Mady Christians (Kate Keller) and Louisa Horton (Ann Deever). This version was directed by Irving Reis and gained two award nominations, Best Written American Drama and The Robert Meltzer Award for Chester Erskine, the film's co-writer. In 1950, Lux Radio Theater broadcast a radio play of *All My Sons* with Burt Lancaster as Joe Keller. It was adapted for the radio by S. H. Barnett, and, in an interesting twist deviating from Miller's original script, featured the character of Steve Deever in a speaking role.

In 1958 the play was adapted for television by Stanley Mann and directed by Cliff Owen. This production starred Albert Dekker (Joe Keller), Megs Jenkins (Kate Keller), Patrick McGoohan (Chris Keller) and Betta St. John (Ann Deever).

The second film adaptation was a made-for-TV movie, released in 1986. This version is much truer to Miller's original play than the 1948 film. The main roles were played by James Whitmore (Joe Keller), Michael Learned (Kate Keller), Aidan Quinn (Chris Keller) and Steppenwolf Theatre's Joan Allen (Ann Deever).

***All My Sons* Encounters Censorship**

In 1947, plans to stage *All My Sons* abroad were met with opposition over its potentially negative depiction of U.S. culture. The Civil Affairs Division of the American Military refused to issue a license for a production of the play in occupied Europe



Plot Summary

Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* begins in the late 1940's after the end of World War II in the backyard of Joe and Kate Keller's home. Three and a half years earlier, Joe and his business partner, Steve Deever, held a lucrative government contract manufacturing airplane parts for the war effort. Joe's sons, Larry and Chris, and Steve's son, George, were all drafted into the war. While their sons were at war, Joe and Steve's plant started to produce defective airplane "heads." While Joe was supposedly out sick, Steve welded over the defective parts and shipped them out. Twenty-one P-40 airplanes crashed because of the defective parts. While Steve was convicted for his crime, Joe was exonerated because of his absence at the plant on the day of the incident. Chris and George returned home safely after the war, but Larry never came home. He was reported missing on November 25, leaving his mother to hope and wish for his eventual return.

It is Sunday morning and the Kellers have a special visitor. Ann Deever, Larry's old sweetheart, has come to visit at the request of Chris. While Kate has not given up hope that Larry is still alive, Ann and Chris have fallen in love through letters. Ann and a terrible rainstorm arrived the night before, both promising to disrupt the family's memories of the war, Larry, and the defective airplane parts.

In fact, an apple tree planted as a memorial to Larry is broken at the trunk by the devastating storm. Chris has asked Ann to the house to propose marriage, a fact that they both know will upset Kate and possibly Joe. Chris talks to Ann that morning, and the newly engaged couple kisses for the first time. Joe provides his blessing to the couple, but is very concerned about his wife's possible reaction. In order to set the mood for the announcement, the decision is made to spend the night on the town eating steak, drinking champagne, and dancing. However, the jovial mood is dampened when Ann receives a phone call from her brother, George, informing her that he has been to see their father in prison for the first time since he got back from the war. George insists on seeing Ann as soon as possible, and will be arriving on the next train.

While the whole party is getting dressed for dinner there is a palpable tension in the air. Everyone is anxious to discover the reason behind George's sudden need to speak with Ann. While Chris believes his father had nothing to do with the defective airplane parts, everyone is concerned that Steve has convinced George of his old accusations against Joe. Steve claims Joe told him over the phone to cover up the defects while Joe was sick in bed, but promised him he would take responsibility for the decision.

When George arrives, this is exactly what has occurred. Over the course of several confrontations, the truth is finally revealed. Joe is guilty of the crime. Ann decides she won't do anything about this new revelation as long as Kate admits Larry is dead, and allows her to



marry Chris. When Kate refuses, Ann is forced to show Kate a letter Larry wrote on the day he went missing. The letter reveals Larry committed suicide because of his father's involvement in the death of 21 American pilots. When Chris learns of the revelation, he demands his father answer for his crimes. Joe agrees, and goes inside to get his coat and turn himself in. As Kate begs Chris to have mercy on his father, we hear a gunshot. Joe is dead.

Character Summaries

Joe Keller: Joe Keller is a strong man nearing the age of 60. He has worked his entire life to build a business and wealth he claims is solely for his family. His desire to protect his business, wealth, and the comfort of his family is so strong that he is willing to commit acts that lead to the death of innocent men. Joe believes these acts of greed can be justified by pointing to the needs of his family. His business partner's family—close neighbors and friends for years—must be sacrificed for the good of himself and his progeny. Joe is a selfish man, a loving father and husband, and an imperfect mortal that fails to recognize the family of humanity.

Kate Keller (Mother): Kate is deeply hurt by the death of her son, Larry, and the crimes she knows her husband committed. She is a thoughtful woman who can only handle the reality of her son's absence by a firm belief that he is alive. If he is dead, she knows her husband is responsible, which is a fact she cannot bear. She loves Joe despite his crime, and fears the possibility of her constructed reality coming unraveled with the arrival of Ann. To recognize Ann and Chris' love is to announce Larry's death. Kate is a strong woman in denial of the reality she lives in. Throughout the play she fights and struggles to keep her patched up family from being engulfed by the past.

Chris Keller: Chris is an idealist. He lost most of his company in the war and cannot shake the feeling he does not deserve the life he has received. He feels guilty about his relationship with Ann, the car he drives, the modern conveniences he has, and the money his father's business provides. Chris is not unaware of the possibility his father committed crimes that led to the death of American pilots, but he believes and trusts in his father. Joe Keller is a statue for Chris. He represents a man above other men. Chris's story is the story of an idealist forced to become practical. He must compromise and watch the "the star of his honesty" go out.

Ann Deever: Ann is the daughter of Joe Keller's business partner, Steve. She was also the former sweetheart of Larry. When Steve was thrown in jail and Joe exonerated for knowingly selling the government faulty airplane parts, Ann and the rest of her family relocated to New York. Ann knows Larry is dead and falls in love with his brother, Chris. After writing to each other for two years, Chris finally invites Ann back home to get engaged. Ann believes in Joe's innocence because Chris does. For her, Chris' honesty is unimpeachable. She has come to salvage a life for herself out of the wreckage of her family, which Joe Keller is actually responsible for. Ann truly loves Chris and, ultimately, is willing to compromise for him.

George Deever: George is Ann's brother. Like Ann, he believed Joe's story because Chris believed in his father. When Ann goes to visit Chris and get married, George decides his father has a right to know that his daughter is marrying. While visiting, George comes to believe his Father's story and rushes to stop the marriage of Chris and Ann. George is a poor and bedraggled lawyer, who can do nothing to prove his father's innocence. George has lost his faith in the law and justice, but must try to protect his sister.

The Tragedy and the Common Man

by Arthur Miller

In this age few tragedies are written. It has often been held that the lack is due to a paucity of heroes among us, or else that modern man has had the blood drawn out of his organs of belief by the skepticism of science, and the heroic attack on life cannot feed on an attitude of reserve and circumspection. For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy-or tragedy above us. The inevitable conclusion is, of course, that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly, and where this admission is not made in so many words it is most often implied.

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instances, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations. More simply, when the question of tragedy in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well placed and the exalted the very same mental processes as the lowly. And finally, if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the high-bred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it.

As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing-his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society. Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his "tragic flaw," a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the characters, is really nothing-and need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." Most of us are in that category. But there are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them, and in the process of action everything we have accepted out of fear of insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined, and from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us-from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment-comes the

terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy. More important, from this total questioning of what has previously been unquestioned, we learn. And such a process is not beyond the common man. In revolutions around the world, these past thirty years, he has demonstrated again and again this inner dynamic of all tragedy. Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of his character, is really but a clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character were indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king. The quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. Among us today this fear is strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best.

Now, if it is true that tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment. And this is precisely the morality of tragedy and its lesson. The discovery of the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of, is not the discovery of some abstract or metaphysical quantity.

The tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself. The wrong is the condition, which suppresses man, perverts the flowing out of his love and creative instinct. Tragedy enlightens—and it must, in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy, which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarred from such thoughts or such actions.

Seen in this light, our lack of tragedy may be partially accounted for by the turn which modern literature has taken toward the purely psychiatric view of life, or the purely sociological. If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action, is obviously impossible.

And if society alone is responsible for the cramping of our lives, then the protagonist must needs be so pure and faultless as to force us to deny his validity as a character. From neither of these views can tragedy derive, simply because neither represents a balanced concept of life. Above all else, tragedy requires the finest appreciation by the writer of cause and effect. No tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable. In the tragic view the need of man to wholly realize himself is the only fixed star, and whatever it is that hedges his nature and lowers it is ripe for attack and examination. Which is not to say that tragedy must preach revolution.

The Greeks could probe the very heavenly origin of their ways and return to confirm the rightness of laws. And Job could face God in anger, demanding his right and end in

submission. But for a moment everything is in suspension, nothing is accepted, and in this sketching and tearing apart of the cosmos, in the very action of so doing, the character gains "size," the tragic stature which is spuriously attached to the royal or the high born in our minds. The commonest of men may take on that stature to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest, the battle to secure his rightful place in the world.

There is a misconception of tragedy with which I have been struck in review after review, and in many conversations with writers and readers alike. It is the idea that tragedy is of necessity allied to pessimism. Even the dictionary says nothing more about the word than that it means a story with a sad or unhappy ending. This impression is so firmly fixed that I almost hesitate to claim that in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker's brightest opinions of the human animal.

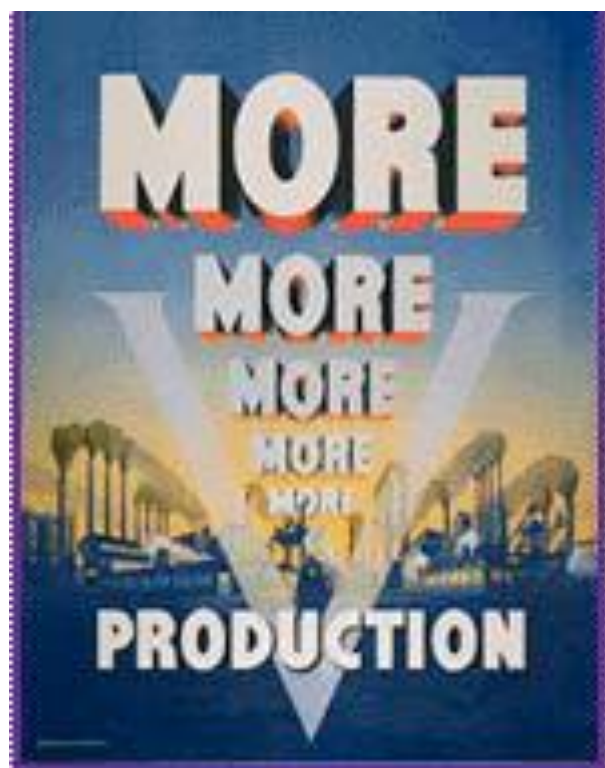
For, if it is true to say that in essence the tragic hero is intent upon claiming his whole due as a personality and if this struggle must be total and without reservation, then it automatically demonstrates the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity. The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not possibly have won. The pathetic is achieved when the protagonist is, by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity, or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force. Pathos truly is the mode for the pessimist. But tragedy requires a nicer balance between what is possible and what is impossible. And it is curious, although edifying, that the plays we revere, century after century, are the tragedies. In them and in them alone, lies the belief-optimistic, if you will, in the perfectibility of man. It is time, I think, that we who are without kings, took up this bright thread of our history and followed it to the only place it can possibly lead in our time-the heart and spirit of the average man.

American Industry During World War II

The American home front during World War II is essentially a lesson in basic economics: As demand for war material skyrocketed, supply congruously followed suit—fueled by a workforce that had previously seen unemployment figures to the tune of 24.9 percent just eight years earlier. In the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt: “Dr. New Deal was replaced by Dr. Win the War.”

The aircraft industry is prime example of this surge in national production: In May 1940, during the same week the Netherlands’ government surrendered to German forces and France was buckling under the threat of invasion, President Roosevelt went before Congress and requested an exponential increase in aircraft production.

Just 18 months earlier Roosevelt had asked that 3,000 additional aircrafts be produced on the government’s dime. This time, he asked Congress to authorize funding for 50,000 new warplanes. The numbers are staggering. In 1939, 2,141 aircrafts were built in the United States. Just five years later, the aircraft industry reached its production peak at 96,318 aircrafts in a single year, more than the USSR and Britain’s aircraft production combined. No amount of government-sponsored social programs could have instigated an economic surge of this magnitude. Yet the irony remained that, while businessmen like Joe Keller prospered with the advent of government war contacts, hundreds of thousands of young American men were perishing on the European and Pacific fronts. It was a dichotomy that was unconscionable and unavoidable, given the desperate need for materiel and the inevitable profits that materiel produced.



By the end of the war, the U.S. had produced 88,410 tanks, 257,390 artillery weapons, 2,679,840 machine guns, 2,382,311 military trucks and 324,750 warplanes. The United States Steel Corp. made 31.4 million kegs of nails, and enough steel fencing to stretch from New York City to San Francisco. Spending on military preparedness reached a stunning \$75 million a day by December 1941, and, by 1944, war profits after taxes reached \$10.8 billion.

Not only were factories asked to churn out materiel at this alarming rate—and it was considered the ultimate patriotic duty to do so—most also were switching from the products they’d previously produced and knew well (air conditioners, washer/dryers, etc.) to complex tank and aircraft parts.

The automobile industry, for example, produced roughly 3 million cars in 1941. In the years following Pearl Harbor, fewer than 400 new vehicles were manufactured as factories were retooled to produce tanks, aircrafts and military trucks. The demand was so high that pilots were known to sleep on cots outside the major plants, waiting to fly the planes away as they came off the production lines.

There is, however, an important distinction between a family-run business like Joe Keller's and mega-corporations like U.S. Steel and General Motors. Given their massive production capabilities, government contracts disproportionately favored these large corporations: Ten companies received 30 percent of the total \$240 billion spent on defense contracts during the war.

Curtailing War Profits

The United States' government was acutely aware of the massive demands it was making on American industry. As early as 1940 the government already had doled out \$10 billion in defense contracts. President Roosevelt, a staunch opponent of war profiteering, was caught between the nation's critical need for material and his aversion to the acquisition of extreme wealth in wartime. "The American people will not relish the idea of any American citizen growing rich and fat in an emergency of blood and slaughter and human suffering," he said in 1938.

The initial tactic employed to simultaneously restrain war profits and garner much needed federal revenue was the Excess Profits Tax, which is levied on companies flourishing during a war. Anything above a 10 percent return on invested capital would be considered excess profit attributed to the war effort and therefore subject to increased taxation (up to 90 percent in 1942). Though morally sound, it is ironic that the tax seemed to reward inefficiency and discourage mass production at a time when the country most needed efficiency and increased production.

Despite pressure from his government to compromise with big business, FDR was still committed to his moral instinct that companies should not rake in cash while soldiers gave their lives across the ocean. There had to be some way to legalize profiteering, or at least ensure that no company was succeeding in spite of inefficiency, mismanagement or internal corruption. If the government could not directly control war profits, the least it could do was make certain that the prospering companies were clean, honorable businesses that were just as venerable as the soldiers to whom they supplied material.



The Truman Committee

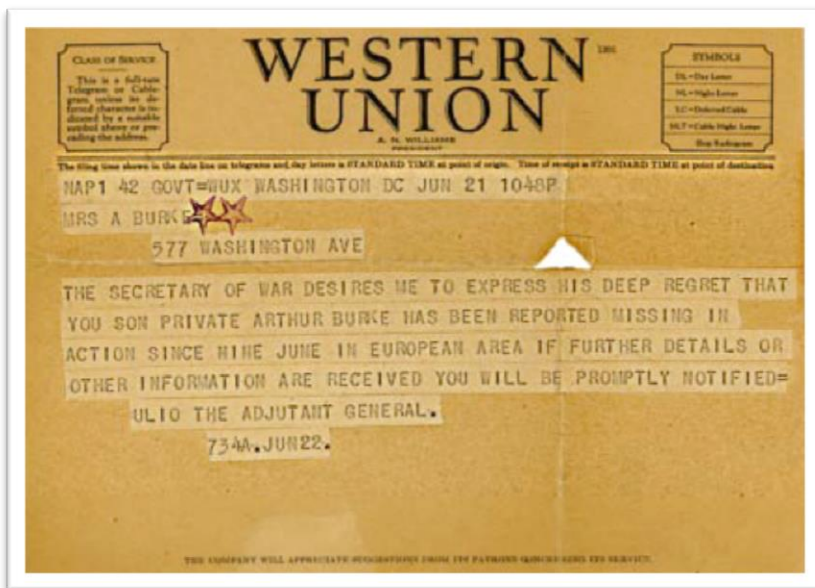


The Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program (nicknamed The Truman Committee in honor of its no-nonsense chairman, Harry S. Truman) is a study in governmental efficiency and productivity. Its aim was not so much to sniff out war profiteers as it was to uncover incompetence, waste and corruption in war-contracted businesses. Truman believed the war effort was essentially being strangled by America's inability to produce material on a large scale, that the Axis powers would only

be defeated by an overwhelming arsenal of ships in the water, tanks on the ground and planes in the air.

In 1941, Truman and his team embarked on a legendary road trip, traveling more than 10,000 miles to visit military bases, plants, small-town factories, and corporation headquarters, with the aim of stamping out bad business and perfecting the American war machine. Between the years of 1941 and 1948, the Truman Committee called almost 1,800 witnesses to hundreds of hearings and issued more than 50 reports. The committee's findings indicted hundreds of companies and undoubtedly saved the lives of thousands of soldiers who might have otherwise perished from defective materiel—as well as millions of taxpayer dollars. The committee was hailed as a grand success and its chairman universally praised for his determination and meticulous management skills. The committee catapulted Truman, then a Missouri senator (D), to political stardom and primed him for his future role as president.

The Drafted and the Missing of World War II



In 1939, the United States Army had fewer than 200,000 men in uniform that could be sent overseas with proper training. As the threat of war loomed larger, Congress realized they could not rely on volunteers to build a competitive army. So in September 1940, President Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act, the first peacetime draft in the country's history. The law required all men ages 21- 35 to hand over their

personal information to local draft boards, thereby submitting themselves to the national draft lottery. That age bracket would later be expanded to men ages 18-45 after the United States officially entered the war. 6,443 draft boards were promptly set up around the country. Families waited with bated breath for Secretary of War Henry Stimson to reach into the lottery "war bowl" and pick out a capsule that would contain a single slip of paper with a number 1 through 7,836 printed on it. The first number drawn on Oct. 29, 1940, was 158; it was held by 6,175 young men across the country.

By the war's end, more than 35 million men had registered with the Army, 10 million of who were drafted. While the American death toll from World War II hovers just above one million, almost 75,000 soldiers remain Missing in Action, the highest number from any American war. Roughly 20,000 of these MIA soldiers were men who served in the U.S. Army Air Forces, whose planes crashed in inaccessible mountainous regions or into foreign waters.

Survivor's Guilt

To a certain degree, Chris Keller suffers from what would later be diagnosed as "Survivor's Guilt," a psychological term originally coined in the 1960s to describe survivors of the Holocaust who felt they weren't entitled to happiness or wealth after the trauma of the concentration camps. The arbitrary nature of war—the sheer incomprehensibility of why certain people die and others live—provides an unstable entry point back into society of most survivors.

In his introduction to *All My Sons*, British scholar Christopher Bigsby writes, "Chris feels guilty about his new happiness. In the war he led his men to their death. He is a survivor who feels the guilt of the survivor, a theme that Miller would return to in *After the Fall* (1964). Beyond that, he can see no connection between the sacrifices of war

and the way of life it was supposedly fought to preserve."

Robert J Lifton, a psychiatrist who studied psychological disorders in WWII veterans, described Survivor's Guilt this way: "It is the soldier-survivor sense of having betrayed his buddies by letting them die while he stayed alive—at the same time feeling relieved and even joyous that it was *he* who survived ... his pleasure in surviving becoming a further source of guilt. Essentially, the survivor is plagued by the question: how I can be thankful and guilty at the

same time?" This syndrome is only accentuated in Chris's case, as it was his brother who died in addition to his entire company. When we meet Chris at the beginning of Act I, he is making his first move since the war toward owning his much-tainted happiness—by asking Annie to visit.



Social Contract Theory

In *Crito*, an early Platonic dialogue, Socrates declines to escape and opts to accept his pending death sentence, the reason being that he is socially obligated to do so. Socrates argues that he is the product of the laws of Athens and owes his education, citizenship and life to the order and civility of Greek society. One of the tenets of the society in which he had chosen to live is that criminals must be punished. Socrates ultimately was unwilling to step outside that social contract, even to save his life.

This idea of a social contract is at the center of *All My Sons*. "The concept behind it was that Joe Keller was both responsible for and part of a great web of meaning, of being," Miller said in 1999, "And a person who violates it in the way he did has done more than kill a few men. He has killed the possibility of a society having any future, any life. He has destroyed the life-force in that society."

Helen Fein, a sociologist and historian who speaks frequently on the topic of modern genocide, coined the phrase "universe of obligation," which she has defined as "the limits of the common conscience; those whom we are obligated to protect, to take into account, and to whom we must account."

Her phrase is a derivative of the centuries-old Social Contract Theory, the idea that by living within a civilized, functioning society, we inherently subscribe to certain moral obligations and rules that, if broken, will shatter the very foundation on which the society is built.

In *All My Sons*, Joe and Chris Keller operate under different assumptions when it comes to their respective universes of obligation and who falls inside and outside the sphere of their social contract.

John Donne espouses the same idea in his famed poem *No Man is an Island* "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind." Donne's poetic rendering of the Social Contract Theory has become known as the Concept of Human Solidarity.

Glossary of Terms from the play *All My Sons*

Newfoundland dogs – The Newfoundland is a large, usually black, breed of dog originally used as a working dog in Newfoundland, a Canadian island. They are famously known for their giant size and tremendous strength, as well as for their sweet dispositions, loyalty, and natural water-rescue tendencies.

Favorable days in horoscopes – A horoscope is related to a person's birth time, date, and year as well as during which of the twelve Zodiac segments the birth occurs. This Chinese tradition, which employs complex astrology/star-chart readings, predicts "favorable days" for specific endeavors—i.e., a favorable day for love, a favorable day for business, a favorable day for significant life-change, etc. The notion that a person cannot die on their one, quintessential "favorable day" is Miller's original creation.

Don Ameche – A prolific American screen actor, famous for portraying real people and historical figures in his films. The movie Frank refers to might be *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell*, in which Ameche plays the inventor of the telephone.

Warner Brothers – One of the country's largest and most prosperous movie studios, founded in 1918. By 1947 the company payroll had reached a staggering \$600,000/week. Don Ameche, however, was contacted to 20th Century Fox.

"For ten dollars you could hold his hand." – Roughly \$80 today

Malted mixer – A milkshake maker, a relatively new appliance in 1947.

Oilstone – A whetstone used for fine woodcarving.

Three-weeks salary in 1947– According to the census bureau, the average family in 1947 earned \$3,546/ year, roughly equivalent to \$27,500 if adjusted to modern inflation. Given Ann's gender and single status, her three-week salary would likely land around \$90, which means she means she spent close to the modern equivalent of \$700 on the dress.

Battalion – A standard army unit consisting of between 500 to 1,000 soldiers, usually led by a lieutenant colonel. Throughout WWII, the Army typically had three to five infantry battalions to a regiment and nine to a division (two-star generals lead a division).

Mother McKeller – Might be a reference to Mother Catherine McAuley, a Christian humanitarian who founded the Sisters of Mercy in 1831, an organization that cared for the poor and sick.

"Those dear dead boys beyond recall" – A reference to J.L. Molly's song "Love's Old Sweet Song," originally written in 1884. The song is also referenced in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Song context: "Once in the dear dead days beyond recall/When on the world the mists began to fall/Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng/Low to our hearts Love sang an old sweet song."

Burma – Controlled by the British since the 1820s, Burma was a major front line in the Southeast Asian theatre of WWII. The U.S. troops fighting the Japanese in the area were nicknamed the American Katchin Rangers.

Haberdashery – Dealing in the business of men’s clothing, namely suits.

“Maybe I too can be president.” – A reference to the fact that, upon his return from WWII, future president Harry Truman opened a men’s clothing store in Missouri, his home state.

Post Toasties – The first cereal company to hide prizes and toys inside their breakfast cereal boxes. The company, founded in the late 1800s, put plastic toys in their cereal boxes as a marketing gimmick beginning in the early 1900s.

Army Air Forces (USAAF) – The military aviation arm of the United States of America during and immediately after World War II; the direct precursor to the United States Air Force. At its peak in 1944, there were more than 2.4 million men and women in service and nearly 80,000 aircraft. There were 783 domestic bases in December 1943. By VE Day 1.25 million men and women were stationed overseas, operating from more than 1,600 airfields worldwide.

Cracked cylinder heads – The top of a cylinder encasing the valves and spark plugs in an internal-combustion engine. A hole (or crack) in the cylinder head would lead to a lack of compression of fuel and air in the engine, so combustion is compromised and the engine won’t start. The most common reason for cracked cylinder heads is uneven heating around the circumference that causes uneven expansion and breakage.



A cracked cylinder head



A P-40 warplane during WWII

P-40s – An American single-engine, single-seat, all-metal fighter and ground-attack aircraft that first flew in 1938. It was used by the air forces of 28 nations, including those of most Allied powers during WWII, and remained in front-line service until the end of the war. By November 1944, when production of the P-40 ceased, 13,738 had been built. P-40s engaged Japanese aircraft during the attack on Pearl Harbor and the invasion of the Philippines in December 1941

Company – During WWII, a combination of two or more platoons typically consisting of 100-250 men. They are led by a Captain or Major.

Last pair of dry socks” – Soldiers typically carried only two pairs of socks at a time, laundering the two pairs only when they reached a main base.

Labor Day – Kissing joke refers to the prevalence of kissing booths at Labor Day carnivals.

“George Bernard Shaw as an elephant” – The Irish-born playwright (1856- 1950) was known for his wit and command of subtext. The joke here is that Joe Keller has neither of these assets.

Columbus – The capital of Ohio; the state penitentiary is located there.

Hair shirt – A coarse, intentionally uncomfortable shirt made from animal’s hair, often worn by religious persons as a kind of penance.

Twenty-five dollars a week in 1947 – About \$200 a week today

Broadcloth – In sharp contrast to the material used to make a hair shirt, broadcloth is a comfortable, soft material (usually cotton, originally wool), that shirts were made out of.

Roué – (French) A “rake,” a man habitually engaged in immoral conduct. The term is associated with gambling, women and excessive drinking.

“Everybody’s gettin’ so Goddam educated in this country,” –Joe Keller makes this comment. Around the turn of the century, the median education level of white males was the 8th grade; high school graduation was rare (Kroch and Sjoblom, 1994). In 1920, just 22 percent of those between the ages of 25 and 29 were high school graduates. By 1940, 38 percent of this age group had graduated from high school, but only 6 percent had graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree.

Brooch/broach – “Brooch” is the incorrect pronunciation of the word “broach,” meaning to bring up a topic of conversation. A brooch is a large lady’s pin.

Zeppelin – One of the first commercial airplanes invented in the late 1800s, operated by DELAG, the first commercial airlines. Zeppelins looked like long, bloated versions of modern airplanes, almost blimp-like, but were quite fast.

Mahatma Gandhi – The political and spiritual leader of India, he advocated nonviolence activism during the Indian independence movement. He was famous for using fasting as a mode of passive resistance.

Russian wolfhound – Equivalent to today’s L.A.-based Chihuahua craze, Russian wolfhounds were considered a fashionable accessory for upper-class women during the 1920s. The hound has a silky white coat and a regal posture.

“He was one year ahead of the draft” – In 1940, Congress signed the Selective Service Training Act, the first peacetime draft in U.S. history for men ages 21 to 35, to serve one year. A lottery based on birthdays determined the order in which registered men were called up by Selective Service. The first to be called, in a sequence determined by the lottery, were men whose 20th birthday fell during the calendar year the induction took place, followed by, if needed, those aged 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 19 and 18 year olds (in that order).

"A truer love hath no man!" – A contortion of the Biblical phrase: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Eagle Scouts – Highest division of Boys Scouts of America; indicative of moral superiority.

Andy Gump – A character in the cartoon family "The Gumps," created by Sidney Smith in 1917. The strip ran in daily newspapers for 42 years.

General Motors – A name that used to be synonymous with prosperity and success. By 1947, GM had manufactured more than 25 million cars and more than 12 billion dollars' worth of war material. George is insinuating here that the Keller's factory seems untarnished by the cylinder-head scandal that destroyed his family.



An aeronautical parts factory, 1943.

"What ice does that cut?" – "What does that have to do with anything?"

Discussion Questions

1. Is Joe Keller justified in his actions? Why or why not?
2. How is Kate complicit in Joe's crimes? Is she just as guilty?
3. If there are two plots within *All My Sons*, one that follows Joe Keller and his crime, and one that follows Chris and Ann's relationship, then describe the actions of these plots and their interactions.
4. When considering Arthur Miller's other works (such as *The Crucible*), and Miller's involvement with the Communist party, do we consider the play anti-capitalist? How do we deal with war profiteering? Is it wrong to make a profit during war?
5. What did Arthur Miller hope to accomplish by portraying "The Tragedy of the Common Man?" What is so important about showing tragedies that are about the middle class?
6. How do you see the theme of greed operating within *All My Sons*? Can we make other connections outside of war profiteering that are similar to the *All My Sons* scenario? Contemporary or historical examples?
7. Consider Chris Keller's worldview versus his father's: One is guided by a sense of responsibility to the greater community, the other by a sense of responsibility to family. Is one of these moral compasses inherently right or wrong?
8. Do you believe there is some legitimacy in Joe Keller's argument that certain wrongs are excusable in the name of family?
9. Consider Ann's reasons for bringing Larry's letter into the Keller home. Do you believe that she never intended to show it to Kate? And why do you think she didn't reveal the information in the letter to Chris sooner?
10. Do you believe Joe Keller is basically a decent member of society? And do you accept Chris's conviction that his father is "no worse than most men"? Or is what Joe did actually evil?
11. In what ways does the experience of war impact this play? Do you think American citizens today still retain that sense of "country" that Chris refers to in the climatic scenes of the play?
12. What should we make of the characters who "knew" about Joe's guilt all these years? What level of culpability do people like Kate Keller and Jim Bayliss share in the crime, given they knew about Joe's deceit and failed to act?
13. Do you think Kate truly believed Larry was coming back all those years? Or was she, on some level, acutely aware of the necessary deceit she was indulging?
14. In what ways is Joe Keller a tragic hero? And in what ways does he defy that label? Typically, tragic heroes harbor a "fatal flaw" that ultimately destroys any hope of redemption. What, do you think, is Joe Keller's fatal flaw?
15. Do you believe Chris had an obligation to jail his father? Or, is there something feudal in that act, given he does not "raise the dead" when he puts his father behind bars?
16. What do you make of Sue's accusation that Chris wants people to be "better than it's possible to be?" Is Chris asking too much of his parents in the final scenes of the play?
17. Do you think the importance of marriage is as profound today as it was in 1947? Is Chris and Ann's situation timeless, or do you think their dilemma is heightened given the significance of marriage in the late 1940s?
18. What do you think becomes of Chris and Ann after the curtain goes down?

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Suggested Viewing:

Jerecki, Eugene. *Why We Fight: The Complete Series, 1943*.

A television series produced at the height of World War II and shown across the nation; the documentary drives home the profound importance of the home-front war effort and home-front material production.

Ambrose, Steven. *Band of Brothers, 2001*.

A 10-part mini-series written by historian Stephen Ambrose and produced by Stephen Spielberg and Tom Hanks, following their collaboration on the film *Saving Private Ryan*. The series follows the story of the Easy Company of the 2nd Battalion from basic training through the end of World War II.

All My Sons, 1948 (black and white); directed by Irving Reis.

All My Sons, 1986; directed by John Powell II.

Suggested Web Sites:

<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/>

Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office.

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The_Truman_Committee.htm

U.S. Senate information on The Truman Committee.

<http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/breitman/1943/10/crimes.htm>

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<http://www.loc.gov/index.html>

The Library of Congress home page; contains searchable information on war profits and World War II statistics.

Additional Resources

Articles:

Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," from *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller* (Viking Press, 1978) pp. 3-7.

This can be found easily at: <http://theliterarylink.com/miller1.html> or <http://artistresearcher.wordpress.com/2010/08/06/arthur-miller-tragedy-and-the-commonman-1949/>

Arthur Miller, General Information on the Web:

Biography: <http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/miller/biography.html>

PBS special on Arthur Miller: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/arthurmiller/none-without-sin/56/>

The Arthur Miller Society: <http://www.ibiblio.org/miller/>

Spartacus Website: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAmillerA.htm>

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