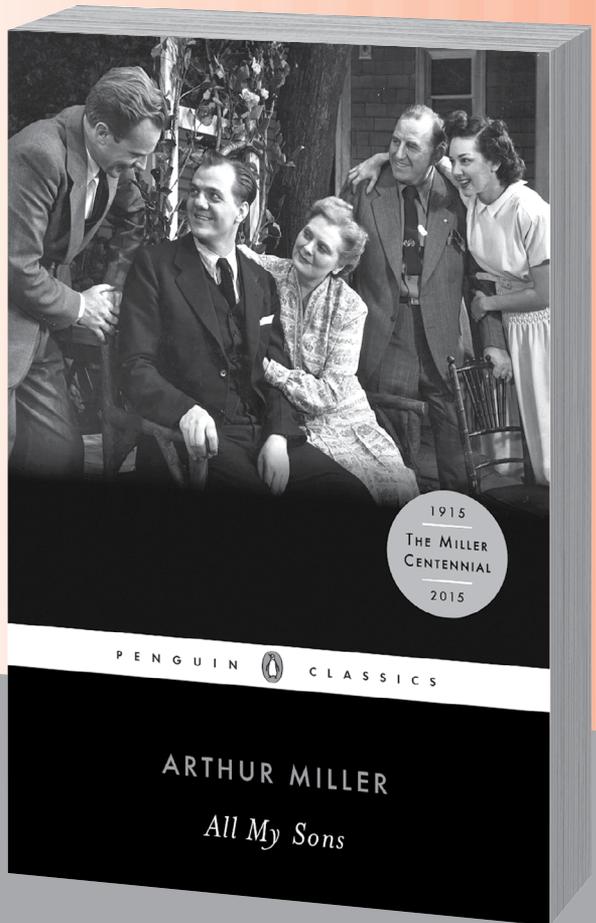


TEACHER'S GUIDE

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE PENGUIN CLASSICS EDITION OF

ALL MY SONS

BY ARTHUR MILLER



BY LAURA MAYER

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INTRODUCTION

Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, like so much of his acclaimed works, seeks to explore the most compelling questions about everyday life and the common man. What is "the good life?" What choices must we make to acquire it? What lies must we tell and truths must we face in the process? What do we owe to our community?

Written in 1945, the play addresses the complexities of an America just beginning to recover from World War II, a world full of loss and hope, recrimination and redemption. After the frugality of the Depression and war years, it was a society where affluence and abundance could overcome personal ethics. Advertisements and propaganda elevated the tenets of capitalism and portrayed the purchase of refrigerators, es, and automobiles as downright patriotic.

What relevance might Miller's play hold for today's students? In an era where they are bombarded with messages of commercialism, rampant materialism, and profiteering, *All My Sons* and its implicit warnings hold plenty of parallels. Americans and their values are just as difficult to define and justify today as in the postwar decade of Miller's text. And the everyday choices persons make can be just as complex and ambiguous.

All My Sons provides multiple, rich opportunities for college and career-ready analysis and activities. In this guide, each of Miller's three acts serves as the anchor piece for a "text set." Each anchor is complemented by additional texts such as speeches, primary documents, videos, or images, providing multi-leveled and multi-modal access to the complexities of Miller's play. Discussion questions and key quotations are provided to elicit student response. Activities integrate college and career ready skills such as evaluating claims, citing text evidence, drawing inferences, determining multiple themes, and analyzing rhetoric, purpose and point of view. Students will take ownership as they read closely and analyze critically, necessary skills in today's classrooms and beyond.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Keller Family

Joe—wealthy owner of wartime airplane parts company

Kate—Joe's wife

Larry—Joe and Kate's son, a soldier missing in action

Chris—Larry's brother, also a war veteran; heir to his father's company

Deever Family

Steve Deever—Joe's ex-partner, serving prison sentence for shipping faulty airplane parts

George—Steve's son, a lawyer

Ann—George's sister, previously engaged to Larry, now engaged to Chris

Neighbors

Dr. Jim and Sue Bayliss—Keller's next-door neighbors; live in the Deever's previous house

Frank and Lydia Lubey—childhood friends of the Keller boys; parents of three children

Bert—neighborhood child and frequent visitor

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

The following activities can be used to build or connect to student's background knowledge in history, literature, and culture.

COLLEGE & CAREER READY SKILLS FOCUS

- Conduct short and sustained research projects to answer a question; synthesize multiple sources.
 - Examine the treatment of similar themes in multiple texts from the same period.
 - Determine the impact of words and phrases as they are used in the text.
1. Engage students in a digital exploration of the post-World War II era. Using a HyperDoc format (<https://hyperdocs.co/samples>), gather multimodal background texts into one central online location and encourage students to take charge of their learning by exploring, analyzing, and summarizing one or more texts, then publishing their thinking and reacting to classmates' ideas. Each image, audio clip, video, or short text on the HyperDoc represents a topic significant to the post WWII era. Explain to the class that by the end of the period, students will be able to answer this question: *What factors contributed to the American sense of identity in the years following World War II?* Students can work individually or in small groups to analyze the texts and write a one-sentence summary statement that suggests how this person or event contributed to the multi-faceted American identity in the post-war years. To publish their thinking for an authentic audience, students can post their summary statements to Padlet.com (<https://padlet.com/>) and then respond to one another via Padlet's comment and reaction tools.

For more information on the benefits of HyperDocs, read "How HyperDocs Can Transform Your Teaching" (<https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/hyperdocs/>). For a quick video tutorial about Padlet, visit <https://preview.tinyurl.com/y8toj3wg>.

Sample topics and links to be used on the HyperDoc include the following:

- Senate Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program (The Truman Committee): <https://tinyurl.com/y7hnn2rc>
 - Lockland Investigation of the Wright Aeronautical Corporation: <https://tinyurl.com/ya3pz4tz>
 - WWII Veteran Survival Guilt: <https://tinyurl.com/yam2te5p>
 - The American Dream in the 1940s: <https://tinyurl.com/yd5gqct2>
 - The Rise of American Consumerism: <https://tinyurl.com/ydbqxx7u>
 - Women's Roles during and after WWII: <https://tinyurl.com/mf6963z>
2. One of the themes presented in *All My Sons* is social responsibility. To immerse learners in this theme as well as the small-town culture depicted in Miller's text, show students the archived short film, *It All Depends* (<https://tinyurl.com/y7u3s7s4>). The ten-minute video clip depicts the life of a small community in the 1940's. It is only towards the film's end that the sponsor is revealed, and it becomes clear that the video is also an advertisement. Ask students to watch with the following purpose in mind: What is the overall message of the film? How do the choices of actors, scenery, and narration support this message? After viewing, students can share their observations with a partner or small group. Then the whole class can reflect on these questions:

- Why is the film titled *It All Depends*? In what ways does the video depict societal interdependence as a social contract?
 - Does the fact that the film is actually an advertisement for a car dealership change the significance or impact of its message?
3. In *All My Sons*, setting and imagery are of primary significance. In his introduction to the text, Christopher Bigsby compares the play's opening setting to an "Andrew Wyeth scene of a Sunday morning in an Ohio town," with gradually inserted "corrosive elements" (p. ix). Ask students to read Bigsby's analysis and discuss in pairs the section on Miller's atmosphere on page ix. Then, provide students with a visual of Andrew Wyeth's *Pennsylvania Landscape* (<https://tinyurl.com/yd56ldzv>) and ask them to analyze the image, beginning with easier, more accessible questions then moving to themes and purpose. Ask students:
- What do you *see* as you look at the painting? What stands out immediately? What elements are more subtle?
 - What is interesting about the perspective in Wyeth's painting? How might it differ from other landscape or small town paintings you've seen?
 - Based on this evidence, what underlying meaning, mood or purpose might the artist be portraying here? What specific elements from the painting support your claim?

Explain to students that, like Wyeth's image, *All My Sons* will provoke more questions than answers. Encourage students to "read between the lines" as they work their way through the text, looking for and recording elements both serene and, as Christopher Bigsby suggests, "corrosive."

4. Arthur Miller's plays are modern versions of Greek tragedies. To build background on the Greek drama tradition, ask students to read the National Endowment for the Humanities' biography on Arthur Miller (<https://tinyurl.com/y75mombs>). After a quick first read to get the gist of the article, students should re-read paragraph three, which focuses on Miller's use of elements from Greek theater. Then ask students to re-read "with a pencil in hand," keeping the following question in mind: According to Miller, what type of character provokes a "tragic feeling" in us?

After re-reading and annotating the paragraph, students should answer the focus question in writing, summarizing Miller's description in their own words. Students should include the idea that the modern, American tragic hero is a "common" or "average" man who attempts to achieve a high position in society and is willing to lay down his life in order to preserve his dignity and personal sense of self. Ask partners to share their summaries with each other before discussing as a class. Explain to students that in *All My Sons* multiple characters may be seen as tragic heroes and they should keep Miller's description in mind as they read the play.

5. Show students the movie trailer (<https://tinyurl.com/ycbd7v4t>) from the 1948 film version of *All My Sons*. The video clip starts with a history of the play's Broadway success and includes images of the theater reviews written directly after the play's opening. After an initial viewing, ask students to describe the mood or tone of the play that the trailer depicts. Students might suggest the play and movie seem "dark," "intense," or "compelling." Next, ask students to watch a second time and select words and phrases that support their thinking. The evidence might be words written on the screen or spoken by the announcer. Students may select "tense," "pulls few punches," "impassioned," and "dark." Tell students to keep the film trailer in mind as the class reads *All My Sons* and evaluate the written text as it compares to this depiction of its stage and film versions.

WHOLE-PLAY ACTIVITIES

These comprehension strategies may be used throughout all three acts of the play, as students build on their analyses of plot, themes, characterization, and style.

COLLEGE & CAREER READY SKILLS FOCUS

- Cite text evidence to support analysis and inferences.
- Determine themes and analyze how they interact and build on one another.
- Read and analyze foundational works of American literature.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Take a multi-faceted approach to reading *All My Sons* with students. Some scenes might be read while others are viewed on film or heard on audio recording. To scaffold for the oral reading of this complex text, provide an “expert read-aloud.” Play an excerpt from an audiobook recording of *All My Sons* (<https://tinyurl.com/ybmlw8dw>). Then invite students to experience the text through the integrated approach of Reader’s Theater, where students read, write, think, speak, and listen. In Reader’s Theater, students perform while reading. No props or costumes are used. After assigning parts, ask students to read their lines silently, consider the character’s motivation, and note words and phrases they want to emphasize. Students might partner up and practice before the class reads as a whole. When it is time for the performance, students face the class and consult their notes as they read. For more about Reader’s Theater, see <https://tinyurl.com/d572lrf>. For a video resource, try one of West End Theater’s clips such as this one from Act I’s opening scene: <https://tinyurl.com/ybjxo7l>.
2. For a quick formative assessment at any point in the play, ask students to “make their thinking visible.” Pose a question to the class and receive immediate student responses on Answer Garden (<https://answergarden.ch/>), a digital bulletin board for brainstorming and check-ins. For instance, ask students to describe the tone of an act or to select a significant word or phrase from a monologue. Student answers are compiled in a word cloud that is projected for all to see. As more answers are posted, the “answer garden” grows. Words and phrases chosen by more than one student appear larger, which provides opportunity for class discussion.
3. College and career ready standards ask students, rather than teachers, to determine the themes and central ideas in a text and to analyze their development and interconnections. Ask students to keep a “Themes Tracker” for themes they uncover in *All My Sons*. As students read and begin noticing a theme developing, direct them to create a new entry in their tracker. For instance, students might determine that “parent-child relationships,” “moral responsibility,” and “accumulation of wealth” appear to be recurring ideas in Miller’s play. Students can track these ideas digitally or by hand. Explain that students may need to backtrack and find evidence earlier in the play as they realize a pattern is forming and building into a theme. Students might share their themes and central ideas with each other and add new entries for classmates’ ideas. If students need help getting started, choose one idea and model how to track its thematic development from act to act, such as in the example below. Alternatively, ask students to use different color highlighters to identify recurring ideas as they read. Margin notes can be used to analyze how the themes are developing and interacting over time.

Theme	Text Citation	Analysis
Moral Responsibility	"I don't know why it is, but every time I reach out for something I want, I have to pull back because other people will suffer" (Chris, Act I, p. 16).	Chris recognizes that he must think of his mother as he plans his future. His mother is struggling with Larry's death, and if Chris marries Larry's girlfriend, their mother would have to accept that Larry is dead.
	"They didn't die; they killed themselves for each other. . . it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of . . . responsibility. Man for man" (Chris, Act I, pp. 35–36).	When Chris thinks about his fellow soldiers who died in the war, he has come to believe that they felt a responsibility to each other that extends beyond the individual. He thinks life should reflect this social contract.
	"Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? . . . You're not even an animal? . . . what are you?" (Chris, Act II, p. 70).	When Chris confronts Joe over his ethical sacrifices, he is accusing his father of breaking the social contract.

4. Invite students to “backchannel” their reactions and wonderings while reading *All My Sons*. The backchannel facilitates total-class participation and provides every student a platform to establish voice. As they read each of the play's acts, ask students to generate questions about the text. Questions might ask for background information, clarification, or interpretation. They could also be about diction, imagery, structure, or point of view. Questions can be submitted on sticky notes to a “Parking Lot” poster or via social media platforms such as Twitter or Backchannel Chat. Teachers might choose to address the questions during a “hotseat” break or allow peers to answer them during class. Online, the teacher can also use the backchannel to pose questions, assign quick-writes, and post digital media that deepens understanding of the text at hand. For information about back channeling, see the following article: <https://tinyurl.com/ybmrU3ex>.

ACT ONE

SUMMARY

The play opens in the backyard of the Keller home, on an August morning following a violent storm. A fallen apple tree, its branches still full of fruit, lies in pieces on the ground. Joe Keller surveys the damage while visiting with his neighbors, Jim and Frank. The men are joined for a short time by their wives, as well as a neighborhood boy, Bert. Talk turns to Annie, former fiancé to Keller's missing son Larry. Ann is visiting at the invitation of Keller's other son, Chris. Chris and Ann wish to get married despite the misgivings of Kate Keller, the family matriarch, who continues to hold out hope that Larry may still be alive. Annie admits she has cut ties with her father Steve, who remains in prison for shipping faulty airplane parts that led to the death

of multiple soldiers. Joe Keller defends his partner's actions to Ann, explaining that Steve made a mistake but is no murderer. Joe and Kate fear Ann and her brother George have come to blame them for Steve's imprisonment. Chris is troubled as well, suffering survivor's guilt because he has become financially prosperous while many of his fellow soldiers died. Joe implores Chris to accept his legacy without reservation—it is the reason Joe has made the choices he has.

COLLEGE & CAREER-READY SKILLS FOCUS:

- Cite text evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Determine themes or central ideas in literary and informational text.
- Evaluate author's claims by assessing their claims and reasoning.

TEXT SET

- *Band of Brothers*. HBO. <https://tinyurl.com/yan3pagk>. (Mini-series trailer).
- “Big Money Behind War: The Military Industrial Complex.” Turley, Jonathan. <https://tinyurl.com/y8o5yrll>. (News article).
- “The Fight for Quality Production.” Truman, Harry. <https://tinyurl.com/y8kakbsa>. (Primary Document).
- “President Eisenhower’s Farewell Address to the Nation.” Eisenhower, Dwight. <https://tinyurl.com/jw9gw7d>. (Video broadcast).

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. Use a primary document to teach the historical basis of Miller's play. In Act I, Miller's characters make loose references to a crime committed by Joe Keller and Steve Deever during the war years. Towards the end of Act I, Ann tells us that her father “knowingly shipped out parts that would crash an airplane” (p. 31), while Joe explains how such a fatal decision came to be. Direct students to re-read Joe's explanation of the plant's “madhouse” atmosphere during wartime (p. 32). Ask students to turn and talk with a classmate and summarize Joe's description. Then, explain to students that this element of the play is based on an actual case during World War II. Distribute copies of Harry Truman's 1943 speech, “The Fight for Quality Production” (<https://tinyurl.com/y8kakbsa>). Read with students the first two pages of Truman's speech. Discuss with the class: What are President Truman's central claims? Students should recognize Truman's claims as:

- America's soldiers deserve the best materials possible to fulfill their duties.
- His senate committee has uncovered several cases where war materials have not met government specifications.

Now direct students to pages 9-12 of the speech, which detail the Truman Committee's investigation into the Curtis-Wright Aeronautical Plant in Lockland, Ohio. Ask students to read and discuss:

- What specific, unethical practices are described? Use text evidence to support your answer.
- How do the facts of the Lockland investigation impact your thinking about Joe's story on page 32? Do you feel more sympathetic toward Joe and Ann's father? Why or why not?
- Now that we have read this historical document, what might you see as Arthur Miller's purpose in writing *All My Sons*?

2. Once students understand the historical context for the play, have them explore the concept of war profiteering, both in Miller's play as well as in current times. Show students a video excerpt from “Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address to the Nation” (<https://tinyurl.com>).

[com/jw9gw7d](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jw9gw7d)), where he coins the term “military industrial complex.” As they watch, ask students to focus on Eisenhower’s central claims and warnings. Discuss with students:

- What does Eisenhower mean by “military industrial complex”? Why does he choose these words? What mix of societal forces is implied in this phrase?
- What precisely is Eisenhower warning America about in his farewell speech? What words or phrases from the speech support your thinking?

Then distribute the Aljazeera article, “Big Money Behind War: The Military Industrial Complex” (<https://tinyurl.com/y8o5yrll>), in which Jonathan Turley delves into a modern examination of Eisenhower’s warning. Ask students to partner-read the article, stopping periodically to summarize and discuss small sections with a classmate and to write a one-sentence summary after reading. As a class, discuss the article’s final line: *It is what Eisenhower described as the “misplaced power” of the military-industrial complex—power that makes public opposition and even thousands of dead soldiers immaterial. War may be hell for some but it is heaven for others in a war-dependent economy.* Ask students:

- How does the article’s final line apply to *All My Sons*?
- At what expense has the Keller family profited?

3. In Act I, Chris attempts to describe the bond between soldiers during wartime. He is struggling with survivor’s guilt and considers his riches to be covered in blood. After students have completed an initial reading of his monologue (pp. 35-36), re-read the excerpt aloud, asking students to read along silently. Afterwards, ask students to discuss Chris’s paradoxical statement: “They weren’t just men . . . they didn’t die; they killed themselves for each other.” Next, show students the video trailer from *Band of Brothers* (<https://tinyurl.com/yan3pagk>—Warning: fast forward when using with students, as the first few seconds contain mature language). As they watch, ask students to look for parallels to Chris’s monologue on pp. 35-36. Afterwards, ask students to respond to the video with a “quick-write” on one of the following questions:

- Explain the soldier’s meaning when he says, “We found in one another a bond—it exists only in combat.”
- What parallels to Chris’s monologue can be found in the interviews with WWII veterans?
- Why might the mini-series be titled “Band of Brothers?” What does the term “brother” imply? How might this word choice apply to a social contract between humans even outside of war?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Miller opens Act I with a description of the downed apple tree. How does the damaged tree contrast with its surroundings? Why might the playwright have chosen to open his play with this image?
2. What insight into Joe Keller’s character is provided by his comment, “I don’t read the news part any more. It’s more interesting in the want ads” (p. 6)?
3. Chris says that Kate was standing outside when the tree cracked at four in the morning. What might be inferred about his mother’s state of mind? In what ways does Kate connect the tree to her missing son Larry? Use text evidence.
4. Joe tells Kate he knows nothing about Chris’s intentions with Ann (p. 21). Based on what has been revealed about Kate, why might Joe choose to lie about this?

5. How do the contents of Larry's closet fit in with what is emerging about life in the Keller's home (p. 26)?
6. Re-read Joe Keller's monologue at the bottom of page 32. How does he describe business conditions in his wartime shop? How does Joe characterize himself here? How is the playwright characterizing him?
7. Why does Chris call his post-war possessions "loot"? Why does he say they are covered in "blood" (p. 36)?
8. Based on what has been revealed in Act I, discuss the irony in Joe's claim: "Because it's good money, there's nothing wrong with that money" (p. 38).

QUOTATIONS FOR READER RESPONSE

Ask students to react to quotes from the play individually or in small discussion groups. Use their reactions as a springboard for developing deeper conversation about the themes and ideas in the play. Students can also select their own key quotes from each Act, journaling about their reactions.

1. "Being dishonest with her. That kind of thing always pays off, and now it's paying off" (p. 14).
2. "I ignore what I gotta ignore" (p. 16).
3. "Everything that happened seems to be coming back" (p. 19).
4. "Believe with me, Joe. I can't stand all alone" (p. 22).
5. "Because certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That's why there's God. Otherwise anything could happen" (p. 28).
6. "Kid, walkin' down the street that day I was guilty as hell. Except I wasn't, and there was a court paper in my pocket to prove I wasn't. . . Result? Fourteen months later I had one of the best shops in the state again, a respected man again; bigger than ever" (p. 30).
7. "Everything was being destroyed, see, but it seemed to me that one new thing was made. A kind of. . . responsibility" (p. 35).

ACT TWO

SUMMARY

It is twilight of the same day. Chris is sawing the broken tree, leaving the stump behind. Kate joins her son, confiding her fear that George might reopen the case against Joe. Sue Bayliss visits with Ann, asking her to move away once she marries Chris, whose "phony idealism" impacts her husband. Ann's brother George arrives after having just visited their father in prison. George demands that his sister leave with him, arguing that Joe was complicit in the actions that landed Steve in jail, and that everything the Kellers have is "covered with blood." Kate welcomes George, reminiscing about the past and making him forget his convictions until she slips and uncovers an inconsistency in Joe's defense. The ensuing argument upsets Kate, who insists that if Ann and Chris marry, they must all admit Larry is dead and that Joe is responsible. As the act ends, Chris is left despondent as his father admits he ordered the actions that resulted in the deaths of twenty-one soldiers.

COLLEGE & CAREER READY SKILLS FOCUS

- Determine themes and analyze how they interact and build on one another.
- Analyze the impact of author's choices.

TEXT SET

- “Arthur Miller on *All My Sons*.” <https://tinyurl.com/yb6hqes5>. (Interview).
- “Saving Private Ryan.” <https://tinyurl.com/ycqt76bg>. (Film).
- “Lincoln's Letter to Mrs. Bixby.” <https://www.bartleby.com/43/38.html>. (Primary Document).

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. The female characters in Miller's play are layered and complex. After an initial, independent reading for comprehension, direct students to perform a second, close reading of the scene where Kate packs Ann's suitcase and says they will wait for Larry to return “Till he comes; forever and ever till he comes!” (pp. 67-68). Ask partners to discuss these questions: How does Miller characterize Kate in the play? What evidence from this scene supports this characterization? Next, show students the short interview clip (<https://tinyurl.com/yb6hqes5>) of Arthur Miller discussing the female roles in *All My Sons*. In it, Miller explains that the character of Kate Keller holds a certain power over the other characters. After viewing, discuss with students:
 - Do Kate and Ann play leading or supporting roles in the play?
 - In what ways do these two women dominate the men in their lives?
 - How do the female characters in Miller's text support or contradict traditional female roles of their era?
 - In the interview, Miller says he wasn't thinking of Kate as strong while writing the play, but then realized how powerful she was when he first saw an actress in the role. What does this suggest about the impact staging has on an author's text? How does the medium of drama support or transform an author's purpose?
2. Deepen students' understanding of the grief suffered by Kate and other mothers during the war years. Show students the video clip from *Saving Private Ryan* (<https://tinyurl.com/ycqt76bg>) entitled “Letter to Mrs. Bixby.” The scene depicts the countless letters being written each day to mothers and families during World War II. In the clip, a commanding officer reads the famous letter from Abraham Lincoln to a mother who has lost four sons in the Civil War. After watching the clip, ask the class: How does the *Saving Private Ryan* scene add to your understanding of the grief depicted in *All My Sons*? How does it change, affirm, or deepen your thinking about Kate's choices in Miller's play? To extend this activity, provide students with a copy of the actual letter to Mrs. Bixby (<https://tinyurl.com/y7cf8zd2>) and ask them to analyze Lincoln's diction and style. Students might focus on Lincoln's reference to “the solemn pride. . . to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.” Then ask students: In *All My Sons*, is the Keller family “proud” of Larry's sacrifice? Explain.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance in the shifts that have occurred in setting? Consider lighting and the apple tree.
2. Sue insists, “If Chris wants people to put on the hair shirt let him take off his broadcloth” (p. 45). How is she characterizing Chris through her choice of words?

3. Joe says of Ann, "I don't understand why she has to crucify the man" (p. 49). Discuss his specific word choice here.
4. Joe is joking, singing, and making plans for a "big night" (p. 50). Discuss the contrast between these preparations and the overall mood of Act II.
5. Re-read George's description of the machine shop during the war (p. 54). How might the atmosphere of the business be described? Use specific text evidence.
6. How is George characterizing Joe Keller at the bottom of page 55? What is George's purpose in asking these questions?
7. Twice in this act, Chris refers to George as "the voice of God" (pp. 53, 56). What does he mean by this?
8. George asks Chris why his name is not on the family business (p. 56). Why isn't it? Include Chris's stated reason as well as what is left unsaid.
9. Twice, George tells Kate she hasn't changed at all (pp. 58, 65). What is Miller's purpose in this repetition?
10. Re-read Joe's explanation of wartime practices at the bottom of page 69. How does he defend his business actions during the war years? Based on his specific recollection, who else is responsible for what happened?

QUOTATIONS FOR READER RESPONSE

1. "It's gettin' so the only one dumb ones left are the bosses" p. (48).
2. "You don't want to be the voice of God, do you?" (p. 53)
3. "Everything they have is covered with blood" (p. 56).
4. "It breaks my heart to see what happened to all the children. How we worked and planned for you, and you end up no better than us" (p. 58).
5. "Your brother's alive, darling, because if he's dead, your father killed him" (p. 68).
6. "Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world?" (p. 70)

ACT THREE

SUMMARY

Act III opens at two in the morning. Kate, as usual, is awake. Chris has driven off after his argument with Joe. Dr. Bayliss sees Kate as he comes home from an emergency, and the two discuss the complex compromises humans must make between money and honesty. Jim goes to look for Chris, and Joe joins Kate outside. Kate cannot find the strength to console her husband or help him decide what to do about turning himself in or losing his son. Defending his choices to support his family, Joe insists that if there is anything more important than family, he will "put a bullet in (his) head." Ann joins the Kellers and demands that Kate free her remaining son by admitting once and for all that Larry is dead. When Kate refuses, Ann shares a letter Larry wrote the day he went missing. The Keller's eldest son crashed his own plane after learning about his father's role in the downed aircrafts. Unable to face the implications of his father's actions and the lack of humanity in the world, Chris is determined to leave town. Realizing that due to his actions, he has lost "all his sons," his own as well as those who have died as a result of his criminal decision, Joe carries out his threat and ends his own life.

COLLEGE & CAREER READY SKILLS FOCUS

- Synthesize comments and respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives.
- Delineate reasoning and analyze rhetorical features in seminal U.S. texts.
- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media.

TEXT SET

- Aristotle. *Poetics*. <https://tinyurl.com/yjzj7ew>. (Essay).
- “Don Draper on Happiness.” (From *Madmen*). <https://tinyurl.com/jgkns5o>. (Television clip).
- “My Tomorrow.” <https://tinyurl.com/ydxq3sjz>. (Print advertisement).

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. The accumulation of wealth plays a central role in Joe Keller's choices and personal identity. Ask students to re-read Act III, focusing on lines about money, spending, and expectations of financial success. Students might cite “Money. Money-money-money-money” (p. 73) and “You wanted money, so I made money” (p. 76). Discuss with the class: What does Joe mean when he says, “Then he'd know how a buck is made in this world?” (p. 76). How is money made in Joe's world? What are the trade-offs?

To place this theme in the context of the post-depression and war years, display the post war Nash Motors ad, “My Tomorrow” (<https://tinyurl.com/ydxq3sjz>). The advertisement depicts a World War II soldier who dreams of a future after the war with fresh sheets, his family, and a brand-new Nash Ambassador automobile. The text of the ad reveals that Nash builds “instruments of war” as well as the “finest, biggest, most comfortable” automobiles available. The company asserts that after “Victory” comes, they will build new cars in record numbers in order to contribute to the “strong, vital, and growing America all of us owe to those who fought to preserve it.” After students read the text of the ad, have them discuss in small groups:

- Why do the advertisers write “The girl I love, my boy, my dog, my car. . .”? What is the impact of including a car in this list?
- In what ways does the Nash company portray purchasing a big, brand new car as patriotic? Use lines or phrases from the ad to support your thinking.
- What visual and print elements align to the traditional “American Dream”?

Ask groups to share one “take-away” or big idea from their group conversations. Explain to the class that this is only one of many ads that encouraged Americans to purchase large-ticket items to celebrate the end of the frugal war years and to stimulate American manufacturing and financial growth. In fact, this philosophy continued for several decades. To illustrate the longevity of this mindset on the American public, show students a short video clip (<https://tinyurl.com/jgkns5o>) from *Madmen*, a television show about an advertisement agency in the 1960's. The show's main character, Don Draper, struggles and often fails to be a good husband and father in a society where a man's success is measured by his material wealth. After groups watch the clip on “happiness,” ask them to discuss:

- How does the *Madmen* clip echo themes in the Nash Motor Cars ad? What specific words and phrases from the video align to those in the print advertisement?
- How does the analysis of the car advertisement and the video clip add to or change your understanding of Joe Keller's character? What lines in *All My Sons* Act III now have new or added meaning?

2. In Act III, Miller's complex analysis of father-son relationships reaches a climax. Challenge students to select the one line or excerpt from Act III that best explores this theme. Students might select:
- "There's nothin' he could do that I wouldn't forgive. Because he's my son. Because I'm his father and he's my son" (p. 77).
 - "I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!" (p. 77).
 - "You had two sons. But you've only got one now" (p. 78).
 - "I never saw you as a man. I saw you as my father" (p. 82).
 - "Sure, he was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons" (p. 83).

Provide students with index cards and ask them to write their chosen line or excerpt on the front of the card. On the back, ask students to analyze Miller's words. When all students have completed both sides of their index cards, assign them to small groups and direct groups to move to separate areas of the classroom. Explain that groups will be listening to their classmates' points of view to affirm, change, or extend their own thinking about the treatment of the father and son theme in *All My Sons*. One by one, students should share only the line they selected from Act III. After reading the line aloud, students should wait to explain their analysis until each of the other group members has weighed in with their thinking about the line. Only then should students flip their cards over and explain their thinking, considering how it might have changed or developed because of their classmates' interpretations. In this way, students have the last word on their chosen quote, but it is an evaluation that has been informed by multiple points of view. To extend this activity, the class can meet back as a large group, and students can share insights from their group mates, including how classmates' analysis may have influenced their own thinking.

3. Review with the class the characteristics of an Aristotelian tragic hero by asking groups to read and summarize section II, part XIII of Aristotle's *Poetics* (<https://tinyurl.com/yjzj7ew>). Provide groups with a graphic organizer such as the one below and ask them to cite evidence in Act III supporting Joe Keller's character as a tragic hero in the Greek tradition.

Tragic Hero Characteristics	Evidence from <i>All My Sons</i> (Joe Keller as Tragic Hero)
Common man who is highly renowned and prosperous	
Character error / frailty (Tragic Flaw)	
Character has done or suffered something terrible	
Moment of Recognition / Catharsis	
Change in fortune (good to bad) or sacrifice of life	

Next, ask students to read Arthur Miller's famous *New York Times* essay, "Tragedy and the Common Man" at <https://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/12/specials/miller-common.html>. Ask students to make marginal notations on Miller's claims as well as the evidence he provides. Discuss as a class: Where might Joe Keller differ from the archetypal tragic hero? Is Joe an American tragic hero? How is an *American* tragic hero different from the classical idea of the tragic hero? As an extension, groups might compose a summary statement or short paragraph defining Joe Keller as a modern American tragic hero. Groups can post their writing on padlet.com or the class website for classmates to read, comment, and extend their thinking.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Jim say to Kate, "It takes a certain talent. . . for lying. You have it, and I do. But not him" (p. 74). What has each been "lying" about? To whom?
2. To what is Jim referring when he says of Chris, "He probably just wanted to be alone to watch his star go out" (p. 74)? Why might Miller have chosen this symbolism?
3. What does Joe mean when he says, "Then he'd know how a buck is made in this world" (p. 76)? How *is* a buck made in Joe's world? Explain.
4. Chris says, "I could jail him, if I were human any more. But I'm like everybody else now. I'm practical now. You made me practical" (p. 80). Why does Chris use the word "practical" here? Why has Chris become practical?
5. Summarize the "principle" Chris suggests when he says, "This is the land of the great big dogs, you don't love a man here, you eat him! That's the principle, the only one we live by—it just happened to kill a few people this time, that's all" (p. 81). When Chris adds, "This is a zoo, a zoo!" (p. 81) to what is he referring? Why does he use the word, "zoo"? What might the playwright be portraying about the nature of humankind?
6. Why does Joe use the words "dirty" and "clean" to discuss money and profits (pp. 81-82)?
7. Discuss the irony in Joe's statement that "a man can't be a Jesus in this world" (p. 83). Who plays that role in the play?
8. What is the meaning of Joe's revelation that "they were all my sons"? Why might Miller have chosen this line for the play's title? What broader theme does it support?

QUOTATIONS FOR READER RESPONSE

1. "Money. Money-money-money-money. You say it long enough it doesn't mean anything" (p. 73).
2. "I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head!" (p. 77)
3. It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clean?" (p. 82)
4. "Larry didn't kill himself to make you and Dad sorry" (p. 84).

AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

COLLEGE & CAREER READY SKILLS FOCUS

- Evaluate multiple sources of information in different media to address a question.
 - Write clearly about complex ideas through effective selection, organization, and analysis of content and quotations.
 - Use technology to produce and publish shared writing products in response to feedback
 - Introduce and develop claims and counterclaims.
1. Connect one of the play's major themes to the modern era. Ask students to read and summarize either the 2013 ABC News Article "Blackwater Founder Eric Prince 'Regrets' Working for U.S. State Department" (<https://tinyurl.com/yaunwfmf7>) or the 2004 *New York Times* article, "A Closer Look at Cheney and Halliburton" (<https://tinyurl.com/yde3dw3t>), both of which provide background on famous scandals involving war profiteering in the modern era. The Blackwater article characterizes Prince as "either a great American patriot. . . or one of the biggest war profiteers in the history of armed conflict." The Halliburton article details the massive profits Dick Cheney acquired from his old company while serving as Vice President of the United States. Check for understanding by asking students to summarize their article's main points in the form of a "hashtag" which they will share with the class. Because hashtags are very short, students are forced to determine the "big idea." For more information about the power of hashtag summaries in secondary classrooms, read "#realteenreaders" (<https://tinyurl.com/y6urbrcqj>).
 2. An additional tool to connect Miller's play to more recent times is through political cartoon analysis. Ask students to form pairs and analyze an image using the Library of Congress's cartoon analysis guide (<https://tinyurl.com/6sfn2rs>). The template includes questions about images, labels, irony, and purpose, and leads students into an accessible yet in-depth examination of Miller's themes. After completing the guide, students might write a more formal analysis or present their thinking to the class. Modern editorial cartoons that align with Miller's themes might include:
 - Nick Anderson's 2014 "Check out my flag lapel pin." <https://tinyurl.com/y7yxhoh9>.
 - Matt Wuerker's 2007 "War Profiteering." <https://tinyurl.com/yckor7uj>.
 - Polyp's 2010 "Rat Race." <https://tinyurl.com/y942q27p>.
 3. Hold a Paideia Seminar on *All My Sons*. Prior to the seminar, discuss with students what an ideal Socratic discussion looks and sounds like, including participation, active listening, and respect of multiple viewpoints. Ask students to set a class goal, such as "I will contribute to the discussion at least one time," as well as a personal goal, such as, "I will mention a classmate's name and extend on or disagree with his or her thinking." Students should record their goals on paper or sticky-notes that are visible during the seminar. During the discussion, take a facilitator's role. Ask a low-risk opening question to encourage total-class participation in a round robin response, such as: Now that we have read the play, what line or phrase in Miller's text is most significant? The question might be provided the night before. Its purpose is to identify main ideas in Miller's text. Then move to a core question to analyze text details, such as: In the "Introduction" to the play, Christopher Bigsby characterizes Joe Keller's self-defense as "you do what you have to do in order to survive" (p. xiii). In what specific ways is this true for multiple characters throughout the text? End the discussion with a closing question that promotes personalization and application, such as: How might the ideas and themes in *All My Sons* apply to a current social issue? Ask

students to evaluate their own and their classmates' speaking, thinking, and listening. Did they meet their class and personal goals? How did the Paideia deepen their understanding of *All My Sons*? For examples of Socratic seminars in secondary English classes, see <https://tinyurl.com/l3y4u4x>.

- Using the discussion feature on Padlet, Google Classroom, or a similar digital collaboration tool, post one of the Whole Play Discussion Questions and challenge students to exchange ideas. Ask students to respond to the question using evidence from the text as well as their own analysis. After they have responded to the prompt individually, students should then read classmates' posts and respond to them. Encourage students to build on each other's ideas in a well-reasoned, thoughtful manner, as they extend or debate one another's thinking. Afterwards, the class can read all posts and look for patterns and themes that emerged in student responses.

Ask students to create their own set of text-dependent questions based on *All My Sons*. Model for students the different type of high-level questions that can be asked about literary text, including questions about text structure, literary elements, and author's purpose. An excellent resource for modeling text-based, literary questions is "Text Dependent Question Types: Literature" at <https://tinyurl.com/y8z3roj8>. Once students have written a question set, they might trade with several classmates to evaluate whether the questions are multi-leveled and require a look back at the play. Then, students can respond to one of their own or a classmate's questions in writing, either as an informal formative assessment or in a longer essay.

WHOLE-PLAY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is Joe Keller's downfall/demise a result of economic/ social conditions or his own flawed character? Is it "the system's" fault, or his own free choice or a combination of both?
- Who does Joe betray—his country, his family, his business partner, his conscience? Explain.
- In his introduction to *All My Sons*, Christopher Bigsby asserts that the play illustrates "a conviction that personal meaning and identity are the product of willed actions" (p. viii). To what extent is this true in Miller's text? Clearly, the actions of Joe Keller have produced a flawed identity, but what other characters have, through their own actions, "willed" a specific meaning and identity? Consider minor as well as major characters in your analysis.
- From the moment it is introduced, the broken apple tree is a major symbol in the play. Delineate the meaning and impact of this symbol throughout all three acts of Miller's text.
- Which character or characters in the play best fit Christopher Bigsby's description of "inhabit(ing) a no-man's-land" (p. x)? Support your analysis with evidence from the text.
- By the end of the play, Joe Keller realizes that "they were all my sons" (p. 83). Discuss the meaning of the play's title. What does it refer to in the play? What might the title refer to in society as a whole?
- How is marriage characterized in Miller's play? Consider the Kellers, the Baylisses, and the Lubeys. Consider, also, the hopes Chris holds for a marriage with Ann.
- Truth and lies are prevalent themes in *All My Sons*. What lies do characters tell? To whom do they tell these lies? What is the ultimate price paid when truths are uncovered?
- Multiple times throughout the play Chris, Kate, and Joe refer to themselves as "ignorant" or feign ignorance. Discuss the significance of this self-portrayal.

10. Blood, dirt, and cleanliness are used as symbols throughout the play. Trace this imagery and explain its significance, both on the characters and the playwright's message.
11. Why does Chris refer multiple times to "the voice of God?" Is Chris a Christ figure himself? Is Larry? Joe? What sacrifices do they make in order for others to live?
12. Consider the last words of the play between Kate and Chris. What is Miller's purpose in ending with the line "Live?" Is the audience to feel relieved, saddened, hopeful? Explain.

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