

SYDNEY  
THEATRE  
CO  
EDUCATION



ON CUE



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Compiled by Lisa Mumford.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Lisa Mumford is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Lisa on [lmumford@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:lmumford@sydneytheatre.com.au)

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# ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

## ABOUT *ON CUE*

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season.

Each school show will be accompanied by an *On Cue* e-publication which will feature essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA, DRAMATIC FORMS, STYLES, CONVENTIONS and TECHNIQUES, visit the STC Ed page on our website.

### Such resources include:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- worksheets
- posters

## ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 35 years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

[sydneytheatre.com.au](http://sydneytheatre.com.au)

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS



John Howard and Robyn Nevin in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016.  
Image: Hon Boey. ©

## SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 9 to 12

## SUBJECTS

English Standard English, Module C: Texts and Society -  
Elective 1: Exploring Interactions  
Drama- Links to Topic 3: Tragedy (*Death of a Salesman* by  
Arthur Miller)

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY AND UBS PRESENT

# ARTHUR MILLER'S ALL MY SONS

BERT  
TOBY CHALLENGER

SUE BAYLISS  
ANITA HEGH

JOE KELLER  
JOHN HOWARD

DR JIM BAYLISS  
BERT LABONTE

FRANK LUBEY  
JOHN LEARY

GEORGE DEEVER  
JOSH McCONVILLE

KATE KELLER  
ROBYN NEVIN

ANN DEEVER  
ERYN JEAN NORVILL

BERT  
JACK RUWALD

CHRIS KELLER  
CHRIS RYAN

LYDIA LUBEY  
CONTESSA TREFFONE

DIRECTOR  
KIP WILLIAMS

DESIGNER  
ALICE BABIDGE

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
NICK SCHLIEPER

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER  
MAX LYANDVERT

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
ELSIE EDGERTON-TILL

VOICE & TEXT COACH  
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

PRODUCTION MANAGER  
CHRIS MERCER

STAGE MANAGER  
MINKA STEVENS

DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER  
KAREN McGREGOR

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER  
JAYMII KNIERUM

PRODUCTION ELECTRICIAN  
PÁDRAIG Ó SUILLEABHÁIN

RPT HEAD ELECTRICIAN  
ANDREW TOMPKINS

RPT DEPUTY HEAD ELECTRICIAN  
HARRY CLEGG

RPT HEAD SOUND  
KEVIN WHITE

FOH SOUND OPERATOR  
HAYLEY FORWARD

PRODUCTION SOUND  
DAVE BERGMAN

RADIO MIC TECHNICIAN  
LAUREN PETERS

RPT HEAD MECHANIST  
STEVE MASON

RPT HEAD FLYMAN  
CHRIS FLEMING

RPT FLOOR MECHANIST  
JASON EDWARDS  
CARL AVERY

WIG, MAKE-UP & WARDROBE SUPERVISOR  
LAUREN A. PROIETTI

WARDROBE MAINTENANCE  
MARTELLE HUNT

CHAPERONE  
ANNE CARROLL

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER  
HON BOEY

2 HOURS 20 MINUTES, INCLUDING  
INTERVAL

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT  
ROSLYN PACKER THEATRE ON 9 JUNE 2016

PRESENTING PARTNER



SYDNEY  
THEATRE  
CO

# FROM THE DIRECTOR

## KIP WILLIAMS

*All My Sons* speaks to one of Arthur Miller's great preoccupations – the idea of truth.

What is true? What does the truth cost us? And how are families, communities and nations held together by lies, denial and a 'performance' of truth that is played out complicitly and collectively?

It's interesting to note that, in the middle of the 20th century, the other major playwright in America, Tennessee Williams, was also interested in the idea of truth. But, unlike Williams, who was more interested in questions of personal truth, Miller is interested in a grander philosophical notion of truth – idealism versus pragmatism; the tension between these two is the driving force inside *All My Sons*.

In 1946, when the play is set, there was a swathe of American servicemen returning to a country that didn't fully understand what they had endured on the war front. But there was also growing economic prosperity for Americans in the wake of the war. The material comfort only served to further bury the unspoken trauma of their personal sacrifice. What had it all been for?

Miller brings that trauma to the surface. In doing so, he probes the very heart of the American dream, throwing into sharp focus the corruptive forces of a money-driven society – one that places the needs of the individual over the needs of the many. So, in *All My Sons*, we find one of the great challenges to the Capitalist Dream – a dream we find ourselves still very much in the throes of. The play's concern with the need for a greater morality and sense of collective responsibility is like a harrying clarion cry for our times.

Miller is a deeply musical writer. And, while there are undoubtedly echoes of Sophocles and Henrik Ibsen, there is an operatic quality to this tragedy. Designers Alice Babidge, Nick Schlieper, Max Lyandvert and I have talked a lot about how to respond to this sense of the epic inside the play. The characters should feel real and have an immediacy, but the writing is not televisual – it demands a heightened response to match. The way in which our staging evolves across the show is coupled to the way Miller's writing opens up. As the truth is revealed and the writing becomes subtly more

expressive, so too does the theatrical language.

By the end, we are deep inside the truth of this great operatic piece – a complicit player in the moral quandary of this world, one that is now ours to resolve.

(Sydney Theatre Company, 2016.)



ALSO AVAILABLE ONLINE IS OUR DESIGNER SKETCHBOOK WITH  
COSTUME DRAWINGS BY ALICE BABIDGE

# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

## ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller was born in Harlem, New York, in October 1915. His grandparents came from Radomysl, Poland, and emigrated to America in the 1880s. His mother was born on Manhattan's Lower East Side, "one of the struggling mass down there climbing over each other to grab the brass ring as it went by", as Miller put it. His father, six years old when he arrived alone to join his family in New York, was illiterate but, by the 1920s, had built one of America's largest coat manufacturing businesses.

The family was rich. Their sixth floor apartment in Harlem looked south over Central Park. But the privileges of wealth ended with the Stock Market Crash of 1929. As the business folded, the trappings slowly evaporated – the chauffeur was fired, the car was sold, Miller's elder brother was taken out of university, jewellery was pawned. The Millers moved into a small house in the poorer borough of Brooklyn.

Miller, a teenager at the time, began delivering bread before school to help support the family. Though he had been peripherally aware of Marxism beforehand, the upheaval of the Great Depression led him towards a deeper engagement with politics. As he recalled in his memoir, "Adolescence is a kind of aching that only time can cure, a molten state without settled form, but when at the same time the order of society has also melted and the old authority has shown its incompetence and hollowness, the way to maturity is radicalism."

This radicalism butted up against his father's enduring trust in the mechanics of capitalism. However, the dynamic between father and son was not simply the story of a child's rebellion. Miller's interest in Marxist ideology also gave him the means to explain his father's business failure as something systemic, rather than personal. He had a way to forgive his father even when his father was unable to forgive himself. Miller would later write, "It has often been said that what kept the United States from revolution in the depths of the Great Depression was the readiness of Americans to blame themselves rather than the system for their downfall. A fine dusting of guilt fell upon the shoulders of the failed fathers, and for some unknown number of them there would never be a recovery of dignity and self-assurance, only an endless death-in-life down to the end."

Finishing high school in 1932, Miller was more of an athlete than an academic. But his athletic skills were not enough to get him a college scholarship; he became "another new young man on the long line waiting for work". Miller continued to live with his parents, taking on menial jobs to save up for his education. In 1934, he was accepted into the University of Michigan as a journalism major.

It was there, in Michigan, that Miller's interest in playwriting came on. The prompt was money. Quickly exhausting his savings, Miller claims that he wrote his first play *No Villain* simply in order to win the University's annual Avery Hopwood award for playwriting – worth \$250 (the equivalent of US\$4,200 today). The play was based on members of Miller's family and told the story of a strike in a garment factory that set a son against his proprietor father. While writing the play, Miller consulted with Jim Doll, his landlord's son, a theatre costumer who lived across the hall, who advised Miller of the typical duration of an act. Aside from that, Miller seems to have had no formal training or guidance in playwriting. It was only after he won the award that he found a critical judge and professional confidant at the university in Professor Kenneth Rowe, who gave him insight into the dynamics of play construction. With a taste for playwriting, Miller won the same prize the next year with *Honors at Dawn*.

Graduating from university in 1938, Miller made money by writing radio plays. In 1940, he married his college girlfriend Mary Slattery, with whom he would have two children – Jane (born 1944) and Robert (born 1947). When America joined the Second World War, Miller tried to enlist, but an old football injury kept him out of the services, so he worked as a fitter in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, writing plays in his spare time.

In his memoir, *Timebends*, Miller himself picks up the thread in the mid-1940s: "I bought a paper and walked down Broadway reading it. The bleeding of Russia was of staggering proportions, but the war was slowly turning against Germany. There was talk of losing half a million Americans in the onslaught against Japan that would be coming up one day soon. I had been turned down for military service twice now. My brother was somewhere in Europe. Yet the city seemed weirdly unaffected. What meaning had all this blood-letting? If my brother died, would it make a difference? As a non-



# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT (CONT.)

combatant I had time for such questions. And I thought that in secret people did worry about the meaning of things but were too unsure to admit it, going along instead with the official pretensions to an overwhelming national purpose that would someday justify everything. I wished I could speak for those people, say what they lacked the art to say.

“In the eight years since winning my first Hopwood Award in 1936, I had written four or five full-length plays; the novel version of *The Man Who Had All the Luck*; *Situation Normal*, a book of reportage about army training drawn from my research for my screenplay *The Story of GI Joe*; and some two dozen radio plays on which I had been making my living. I was walking through the city in wartime feeling the inevitable unease of the survivor. I had even tried to serve by applying for a job with the Office of War Information, the propaganda and intelligence agency, but with my school-book French and no connections I apparently had nothing to offer and was turned down. I seemed to be part of nothing, no class, no influential group; it was like high school perpetually, with everybody else rushing to one or another club or conference with a teacher, and me still trying to figure out what was happening. I was only sure that writing was not a matter of invention; I could not be the Dickens of *The Book of Knowledge*, his head surrounded with portraits of characters that had miraculously sprung from it. The city I knew was incoherent, yet its throttled speech seemed to implore some significance for the sacrifices that drenched the papers every day. And psychologically situated as I was – a young, fit man barred from a war others were dying in, equipped with a lifelong anguish of self-blame that sometimes verged on a pathological sense of responsibility – it was probably inevitable that the selfishness, cheating, and economic rapacity on the home front should have cut into me with its contrast to the soldiers’ sacrifices and the holiness of the Allied cause. I was a stretched string waiting to be plucked, waiting, as it turned out, for *All My Sons*...”

At that point, Miller, in his late twenties, had a list of plays to his name that had all failed to gain traction. His only Broadway production, up until then, was *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, which had closed after four performances in 1944. He began *All My Sons* as his final shot at playwriting. He would hold back the play until he was sure that every page

worked. Then, if his judgment still proved wrong and the play failed, he would leave the theatre behind and write in other forms (he had success with his novel *Focus*, published in 1945).

Where it had previously taken Miller three months to write a stage play and eight weeks to write a radio play, *All My Sons* took two years. Along with this more rigorous craftsmanship came a stylistic shift; *All My Sons* was the first of his plays that could be considered naturalistic, but he was searching for something more than naturalism.

Miller imagined a kind of play where, as in Greek drama, issues were confronted head on and the actions of the characters could resonate with a greater social narrative. Miller “desired above all to write rationally, to write so that I could tell the story of the play to even an unlettered person and spark a look of recognition on his face”. His desire to connect the action of *All My Sons* with its social context was imperative – he wanted the audience to see not only the fault of the characters, but the way in which any one of us can make immoral choices when we become a function of capitalism, morally divorced from our own actions and responsibilities in the service production and distribution. For Miller, *All My Sons* was not a moral play, but a social one.

He had been gifted the idea of the play by his mother-in-law. Miller recalled her recounting a story of faulty machinery being sold to the Army and a daughter turning her father in to the authorities. In translating this story to the stage, Miller drew not only on the Greeks, but also on Henrik Ibsen (the Norwegian father of theatrical realism). Ibsen’s late-19th-century plays *The Pillars of Society* and *The Wild Duck* gave Miller the framework for his plot and a lesson in how to bring the past into the present. In *The Pillars of Society*, rotten, unseaworthy ships are poorly repaired to give the illusion of soundness; in *The Wild Duck*, one half of a business partnership takes on the moral and legal culpability that rightly belong to them both. In Ibsen, Miller also saw a fellow playwright driven to make theatre that mattered to society – as Miller put it, Ibsen “sought to make a play as weighty and living a fact as the discovery of the steam engine or algebra”.

Miller finished writing *All My Sons* in the summer of 1946. The initial reception did not bode well. The producer he sent it to turned it down. Miller’s agent did not even return his call.



# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT (CONT.)



Chris Ryan, Eryn Jean Norvill, and Josh McConville in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

Angered, Miller found a new agent – Kay Brown, who would go on to represent him for almost forty years – who took it to the directors Elia Kazan and Harold Clurman. They would produce it, Kazan would direct it. As Clurman reportedly put it, “Goddammit, this play is built!”

After tryouts in Boston, the Broadway season began in January 1947. The opening line of Brooks Atkinson’s review in the *New York Times* was clear, “With the production of *All My Sons*, at the Coronet last evening, the theatre has acquired a genuine new talent.”

*All My Sons* marked the beginning of a new chapter of success for Miller. Its first Broadway season ran for 328 performances, winning Best Play from the New York Drama Critics’ Circle. Miller’s next play would be *Death of a Salesman*.

(Sydney Theatre Company, 2016.)



CHECK OUT OUR PRE-SHOW IN-THE-KNOW FACT SHEET FOR  
ESSENTIAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SHOW

# SYNOPSIS

ALL MY SONS TELLS THE STORY OF THE KELLER FAMILY, SHORTLY AFTER WORLD WAR II. THE KELLERS ARE A WELL-LIKED AND RESPECTED FAMILY WITHIN THEIR SMALL-TOWN AMERICAN COMMUNITY. THE ACTION OF THE PLAY OCCURS OVER A 24 HOUR PERIOD.

## ACT I

The play opens on a Sunday morning in the backyard of the Keller family home. Joe Keller, the family patriarch, and his neighbours observe that Larry's tree has fallen down through the night from the wind. The tree was planted in honour of the Kellers' son Larry who has been missing since the war. A neighbourhood child, Bert, comes to visit Joe. They have an ongoing game in which Bert is a policeman, and Joe imprisons the criminals Bert finds in his imaginary basement gaol.

Joe and his son Chris discuss the arrival of Ann Deever, who was Larry's fiancée before the war. Since Larry went missing in the war, Chris and Ann have fallen in love and plan to marry. Although Joe is resistant to the idea, he eventually accepts Chris's decision but is worried about how Kate, Chris's mother, will take the news as she still believes Larry will return.

It is revealed that Joe, and Ann's father Steve Deever, were neighbours and in business together making engine cylinders for U.S. Air Force planes during the war. They produced faulty cylinders and twenty-one pilots subsequently died. Joe was exonerated but Ann's father Steve is in prison serving a sentence for the crime.

Before dinner Ann receives a phone call from her brother George to say he has been to visit their father, Steve, who is in prison and that George is urgently coming to visit Ann at the Keller house tonight.

## ACT II

George Deever arrives and appeals to Ann's knowledge of their father, saying that Joe knew what was happening in their factory, and lied in court to absolve himself of guilt.

Chris forces Joe into an admission of guilt, in which Joe says that he knew the cracked cylinders were being shipped out. He also tries to explain that he did it for Chris, that Joe needed the business to keep operating to support his family, and so his son would have a business to inherit.

## ACT III

The final act is set at 2am the following morning. Kate is sitting awake waiting for Chris to return, he left following the confrontation with his father. Chris returns and tells Ann that they can't be together because of the situation. In an attempt to justify his behaviour, Joe tells Chris everyone was making money from the war. Ann gives Chris a letter from Larry, which he proceeds to read aloud in front of the family. It is a suicide note in which Larry tells Ann he is so ashamed of his father's actions that he cannot go on living. The play ends with each of the family members each reacting to the devastation in their own way.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS



John Howard and Toby Challenor in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

## JOE KELLER

Joe is the problematic 'hero' at the centre of this tragedy. He is the central protagonist whose actions drive the plot. Joe is an 'everyman', a father, husband, and hard-working business man. He runs a factory, which during the war was in partnership with his friend and neighbour Steve Deever, and produced airplane engine cylinders for the U.S. Air Force.

Joe is an 'ordinary man' who has always tried to earn money and do the right thing by his family. During the war, he made the fatal mistake of allowing cracked cylinders to be used in U.S Air Force planes. He did this knowingly, but justified it as he was making money to support his family and felt that because it was wartime, people were profiting from death everywhere. When it came to trial, Joe blamed his business partner Steve Deever and claimed ignorance about the faulty cylinders. Steve is in gaol, serving a sentence for the crime of which they were both guilty.

Joe committed an unethical act, and continued to be unethical by lying about it in order to preserve his own freedom. He doesn't think beyond himself and his immediate world, Joe acts in a way to do what he sees as best for his own family and not the wider world around him.

Joe is well-liked within his small town and his neighbours come

to him for advice. As Joe was exonerated at the time of the trial, it seems he is accepted in his family and community as an innocent man. However as the action plays out it becomes apparent that this is feigned ignorance in order to keep peace. Joe's neighbours and family accept him as an innocent man to maintain the status quo, but as the action of the play progresses it becomes apparent that they know about Joe's crime. This attempt to maintain peace is self-serving, perhaps they could have helped Joe earlier and as the saying goes, bad things happen when good men look away.

Although he maintains a thin façade of innocence, Joe's guilt shows through frequently. Joe says that he wishes Chris to inherit his business 'without shame.' This statement implies Joe's guilt; if he were innocent there would be no shame to avoid.

At the end of the play, when Joe's fatal flaw leads him to the logical conclusion, he still maintains that he took the actions he did because he thought it was the right thing by his family. One of the key elements of a tragedy is a hero, or protagonist, afflicted by a fatal flaw known as hamartia. This is an error in judgement, or a choice the character makes that will ultimately lead to their downfall. In *All My Sons*, Joe is the tragic hero, and his fatal flaw is his greed which leads him to allow the cracked cylinder heads to be sent to the U.S. Air Force for use. Joe's ignorance and his belief that he acted for the right reasons exacerbate the tragedy of his situation.



# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)

## KATE KELLER

Kate Keller is Joe's wife, and the mother of Chris and the absent character Larry. She is an affectionate and loyal woman described as having an 'overwhelming capacity for love', devoted to her husband and family. Kate is in denial about Larry's death, often referring to pilots who have returned after the war is over, and thinks because his body was not found that he must still be alive. Kate is superstitious and asks Frank, one of their neighbour friends, to examine Larry's horoscope to determine if he might still be alive.

Kate's denial of Larry's death is deep-seated and complicated. On one level she is a grieving mother who can't accept the loss of her son, but on another level Kate knows that if Larry is dead, Joe's guilt is confirmed. She is a smart woman and is supportive of her husband's objective to provide for his family. Kate knows that Joe is guilty; she goes along with the lie that he was sick in bed at the time of the criminal incident because she needs to protect her family and Joe. Kate's state of denial also serves to maintain her sense of reality, acknowledging the truth of their family would unleash a chaos she is incapable of dealing with. By the end of the play, Ann has revealed Larry's letter to Kate and she is forced to accept the truth about Larry and her family. The final revelations of the play unleash the chaos Kate has always feared, culminating in Joe's death.



John Howard and Robyn Nevin  
in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*,  
2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)



## CHRIS KELLER

Chris is the eldest son of Joe and Kate, he will inherit the family business, and he plans to marry Ann. Chris admires his father greatly, he is very loyal and idealistic. He has invited Ann to their house as the two of them have been writing for the last three years; they have fallen in love and plan to marry. Ann's visit is to announce their intentions to his parents. Chris plans to have a similar life to his father: to work in the factory, to marry Ann, and to raise a family in their home town. In this way he is similar to his father, but Chris also differs greatly.

Chris embodies the wartime idealism of American society. He goes to fight a war and subsequently is united with comrades and is part of something bigger than himself, a greater political cause. The experience of returning home is difficult for Chris; the pragmatism that is required to go back to regular life is a challenge, and is in direct contrast with the life he has been leading at war. The relationship he establishes with Ann is an opportunity to maintain some idealism and romance, as well as a way of feeling closer to his brother again. It is revealed in the play's climactic moments that Chris was the only person who didn't suspect his father's guilt in the cylinder incident. His admiration for his father, his idealism, and his faith in the justice system meant he was able to remain ignorant. Because of this, Chris suffers the most shock and disappointment when the truth is revealed to him.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)

Eryn Jean Norvill, Chris Ryan,  
and Josh McConville in rehearsal  
for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016.  
Image: Hon Boey. ©



## ANN DEEVER

Ann is Larry's childhood sweetheart. They grew up next door to each other and were planning to be married upon Larry's return from war. Larry sent his suicide note to Ann telling her not to wait for him, that he would not be returning from the war. He explains to Ann that he knows what his father has done and it is the shame of this which leads him to take his own life, Ann is the only person with this information. Ann and Chris have been writing to each other for the three years subsequent, have fallen in love and plan to marry. Ann's visit is for Chris and Ann to tell his parents their plan. She accepts the legal ruling of her father's guilt and has lost all contact with him since he has been in prison, she moved to New York City to escape the shame of her father's crime and this is her first returning visit.

Ann is polite and gentle but not submissive. She has her own opinions and standards which she maintains without deliberately offending any of the other characters, Ann stands up for herself, even to Joe and Kate Keller.

As the recipient of Larry's final letter, Ann is the only character who knows for sure that he is not coming back,

until she reveals it in the final scenes of the play. She doesn't tell the Kellers the truth earlier as it might jeopardise her relationship with Chris, but also because she doesn't want to upset the family unnecessarily. She is happy to leave the past behind them and move forward. Like a messenger in a Greek Tragedy, Ann acts as the catalyst for the final dramatic action. In the ancient Greek tradition, the messenger was a device by which important information about offstage occurrences could be conveyed to the onstage characters and hence the audience. In *All My Sons* Ann fulfils a similar function and is one of the means by which Miller evokes the ancient Greek form in all its tragic grandeur.

Ann is central to the dramatic meaning of the play, she is the truth teller and the only character who knows the whole truth from the start. She carries Larry's letter with her throughout the play and reveals it only when it is absolutely necessary. This production of *All My Sons* focuses on the suppressed secrets of the family, and the inevitable revelation of them. Ann is the catalyst and the messenger which allows this truth to be revealed. This makes her central to the action and crucial in the creation of dramatic meaning.



# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)



Josh McConville and Eryn Jean Norvill in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

## GEORGE DEEVER

George is Ann's brother and Steve's son. He has been away in recent years studying law, in order to better understand his father's case so that he might prove his innocence, or at least Joe's guilt.

When he arrives in the second act, he is on a very clear mission to convince his sister of their father's innocence and Joe's guilt, and to take her away from the Keller house.



Anita Hegh and Bert LaBonte in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

## THE NEIGHBOURS

Frank and Lydia Lubey, and Jim and Sue Bayliss act as a kind of chorus to the tragedy of *All My Sons*. Frank and Lydia live next door to, and are friends of, the Kellers. Lydia Lubey and George Deever were childhood sweethearts. Jim and Sue now own the house the Deevers used to live in before Steve went to gaol. It is immediately next door to the Keller home, and Jim is a doctor. Miller includes these choral-like characters to aid the plot but also to contextualise the Keller family as a regular suburban American family, liked and respected by their neighbours.

Through the neighbours the audience is able to gauge community reactions to the Kellers as well as learn about the family's history. Through conversations that play out, information about the past is revealed, as well as other key insights such as Frank helping Kate with the horoscope for Larry.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)



## BERT

Bert is a neighbourhood boy who has a playful relationship with Joe. He pretends to be a police officer reporting local crime to Joe so that criminals may be imprisoned in Joe's imaginary basement gaol. This game between Bert and Joe is a symbolic reminder of Joe's dealings with the justice system.

That Bert is a child allows Joe to assert authority over him, and the game allows Joe to exercise power and control within an imagined legal system, to perform and re-perform innocence and legal vigilance, to prove himself as a moral authority and to re-remember himself as innocent.

Bert is played alternately by Toby Challenor and Jack Ruwald.

# THEMES AND IDEAS



John Leary, Eryn Jean Norvill, and Robyn Nevin in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

## THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American Dream is an ideology commonly referred to in literature and politics. It follows that all Americans have access to a good job, wealth, property ownership, and prosperity simply by virtue of the fact that they are American. It assumes that all Americans are born free and equal, so have access to the same opportunities regardless of race, gender, or social status. The pursuit of The American Dream was of particular interest to Arthur Miller and is a theme he explored in much of his writing.

Arthur Miller refers to Joe Keller as 'a man among men' in the opening description of his character, by which he means a man like other men; not exceptional. A man who works hard for his family and wants to be able to provide, a man in pursuit of the American Dream. Establishing this in the play's beginning makes Joe's plight all the more tragic, as he is just a regular man trying to achieve noble things for his family and he goes to unethical lengths to do this.

Joe lives in pursuit of the American Dream; he wants prosperity and happiness for his family, for his sons to inherit his business, and he has worked hard in a factory his whole life to achieve this. This is why, when faced with the choice to do the right thing and recall the cracked engine cylinders, he does not. He doesn't think of the far-reaching consequences in that moment, he is thinking only about the immediate consequences to his business, and the loss of productivity that could result in him losing money. He selfishly puts his own needs above a wider societal responsibility. Joe also sacrifices the freedom of Steve Deever, he blames his business partner and friend for the production of the faulty engine parts.

The Kellers present an image of normalcy to the world around them, Kate Keller stays at home and runs the domestic realm and Joe Keller goes to the factory to earn money for his family. Performing these gendered roles fulfils the expectations of the society in which they exist, thus portraying an image of perfection and further, innocence. For if they live their lives in the expected way like everyone around them, they will not be suspected of the crimes they are implicated in.

The American Dream is brought under examination through Joe. He feels such an immense amount of pressure to support his family, earn money, and maintain a good social status, that he is willing to sacrifice the lives of 21 young pilots, and the freedom of his business partner and friend Steve Deever. Miller is pointing to the selfishness of such a pursuit, and the problem with the ways the American Dream promotes competition and encourages the individual to put their own needs before the needs of a wider society.

The play forces the audience to consider the choice they would make, were they in Joe's position. Perhaps he thought he was doing the right thing at the time, and could not have predicted how serious and far-reaching the consequences would be. Allowing the cracked cylinders to go out to the U.S. Air Force was a decision he made in order to continue productivity in the factory, and keep making money.

Like many of Miller's plays, *All My Sons* is a critique of the American Dream. Joe's predicament and the choices he makes are ultimately selfish and destructive, and through his writing Miller suggests the pursuit of the American Dream is a selfish and problematic one. It upholds the value of personal gain above wider social commitments and Miller points to the destructive nature of this way of living. Miller is also writing at a time of disillusionment with American politics and his critique is much broader than that of the individual. After World War II, which Miller avoided fighting in due to injury, there was much anti-communist sentiment in the Western World and through his examination of the American Dream Miller is also critiquing conservative politics and capitalism more broadly.

Through Joe, Miller seeks to illustrate how dangerous a self-serving and entitled way of life can be. Through Joe's downfall, Miller is allegorically pointing to the downfall of the American capitalist system, as the result of the ultimately destructive pursuit of the American Dream. By the end of the play, Joe pays the ultimate price for his pragmatism and while he is only one man, he comes to represent all men in pursuit of



# THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

## SELF INTEREST AND RESPONSIBILITY TO A WIDER SOCIETY

Joe makes a choice that will have disastrous wider consequences, for the benefit of his family. He acts out of self-interest, he allows the production line to continue so that he may keep raising revenue and support his family, but this is at the expense of the lives of the pilots who died as a result, and ultimately at the expense of the life of his own son, Larry. Joe is described as being 'uneducated' and a 'machine-shop worker' in the play's opening, he works hard in a factory to look after his family. He thinks only of the world immediately around him, of his family and his business, but he is also a member of a wider society.

People have a responsibility to their fellow citizens, and at the most basic level this means not deliberately causing harm. Through Joe's context, the play interrogates if it is ever justifiable to forsake a wider societal responsibility to get ahead in life; his background and education, and the pressure he feels to provide for his family are brought under examination as potential explanations for his behaviour. Joe has lived through the depression, perhaps another reason why he feels the need to hide the truth and maintain a business-as-usual attitude. He knows what it is like to be unsure of when the next meal will come, and doesn't want his sons to have to experience this. Can the intention of an action change the criminality of its outcome?

Arthur Miller has spoken about the social contract which Joe Keller breaks: '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.' Joe's failure here goes beyond the lives of the pilots he is responsible for and ultimately sacrifices, and beyond the freedom of Steve Deever which he also sacrifices, and extends to the fabric of society.

Joe breaks the social contract through his criminal actions; he puts the needs of himself and his family before the needs of the world in which he lives. In doing so, he creates chaos. The lives of the characters and the world of the play are thoroughly disrupted by Joe's actions, a consequence of breaking the social contract.

## WAR

The play is set when it was written in 1947, two years after the Second World War ended. The recent war looms over the Kellers, and it is established early that the absent Keller son, Larry, was a pilot in the war and has been missing in action for the last three years. He is presumed dead by all of the characters except Kate, who holds on to hope that her son might still be alive.

The play investigates how war affects the family structure, mental health, and the nation. It also presents a deeper investigation into the ways war allows business and production to flourish and the ethics of profiting from war. Larry, although absent from the play, is very present for the Keller family. The tree planted in his honour has fallen down at the play's opening, and he is spoken about almost constantly. The experience of losing a family member was very common in the war, and the play explores the ways this loss can affect a family long into the future. Larry is a spectre that lingers to remind the audience of the devastating effects of war, and of Joe's choice.

Joe's manufacturing decision essentially makes him guilty of a war crime. A war crime is a deliberate war time act which breaks the Geneva Convention and is seen to be outside of what is considered fair wartime behaviour. A war crime might include killing innocent civilians or knowingly orchestrating unnecessary harm or death. Even war has rules; although the Geneva Convention was not established until after the war, there were still unethical behaviours in the Second World War. Joe's decision caused the avoidable death of twenty-one pilots, ultimately for his own financial gain.

## GUILT, BLAME, AND ATONEMENT

The main tension of the play is Joe's truth, his attempts to hide it, and the fear of what the consequences will be, if and when it comes out. He blames Steve Deever in order to free himself of guilt, and feels justified in doing so as he is protecting his family. This justification is self-serving and will have disastrous wider ramifications.

There is an imaginary gaol in Joe's basement, and he plays a game with a neighbourhood boy Bert, in which Bert is a policeman and reports local wrongdoings to Joe. This game serves to remind Joe of his dealings with the legal system, and acts as a metaphor. The game reminds the audience how present Joe's crime is, and how heavily his guilt weighs on his mind. By inventing the game Joe attempts to trivialise the legal system in order to distance himself from the seriousness and reality of his actions. Paradoxically, in doing so, the opposite is achieved. The references to the gaol in Joe's house remind the audience just how guilty he is. The imaginary gaol in the basement of the house acts as a metaphor for the internalisation of Joe's guilt; deep down, he knows he is deserving of punishment.

Guilt is also explored through the character of Chris, who must feel the guilt of the returned soldier. He has returned safely from the war, he has lost his brother and presumably

# THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)



Eryn Jean Norvill and Robyn Nevin in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

countless other comrades. The relief of returning home is heavily tainted by these losses and the feeling of guilt for surviving would be overwhelming. In a way, Chris is also implicated in the guilt of Joe's crime, as a beneficiary of Joe's freedom through the ways in which he has subsequently profited from the successes of the business.

There is a complex interplay of guilt within the Keller family unit because of the ways Joe can be held accountable for Larry's death, and Chris accountable for Joe's. In the same way, if Kate admits Larry is dead she is admitting Joe's guilt as well. This fraught reality is why denial reigns in the Keller household.

This production focuses on the truth, and exposing the truth. Throughout the play, the characters are driven by hiding and denying the truth, but through foreshadowing the audience knows from the beginning it will ultimately be revealed. The set design signifies this slow revelation of truth and the chaos it creates for the Keller family. As the interior world of the family is revealed physically, so too their secrets are revealed as the ultimate truth is told. In the final moments of the play Joe attempts to atone his crimes through suicide, a tragic irony which will only further devastate the family.

## IDEALISM AND PRAGMATISM

The play is set at the end of the Second World War, a time in American history when the reality of returning home from war meant returning soldiers had to leave an ideology of nationalism behind, for the pragmatism of everyday life. After fighting for their country, and defending a national ideology, soldiers had to return to the day-to-day realities of life. This meant returning to a conventional job to provide for a family and being practical about making money. This contrast, this shift from an ideological to a pragmatic way of living is represented in *All My Sons* through Chris Keller. Chris struggles with this return to reality and this is ultimately represented in the final moments of the play when Joe's truth is revealed. Chris's shock at his father's actions is exacerbated by the resentment Chris feels towards the pragmatic attitude Joe abides.

Joe's actions represent the business-as-usual pragmatism that Chris rejects; he cannot forgive his father for this profiteering act which stands in direct opposition to his idealism. It is this contradiction of values that cannot be resolved and work against each other to the extent that Chris drives his father to kill himself.

The characters of Chris and Joe represent the contrasting values of wartime idealism and post-war pragmatism. It is this contrast of values, and their failure to resolve them which sees the play end so tragically. Chris is idealistic and proud to have fought for something bigger than himself and his immediate domestic world, but this is exactly what Joe lives for. Joe is a pragmatic man who lives and works to support his family.



# STYLE



Josh Mcconville, Chris Ryan, and Eryn Jean Norvill in rehearsal for STC's *All My Sons*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

## TRAGEDY

'I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were.'

'...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.' In his essay *Tragedy and The Common Man*, Miller discusses his interest in writing tragedy.

While a tragedy ends in suffering for a character or characters, it is usually because of their attempts to achieve a kind of greatness, the pursuit of something bigger than themselves. This is the optimistic outcome for Miller, that the character's plight is to better themselves or their world, to achieve a kind of greatness. Joe is trying to create a better life for his family, to create a legacy worth inheriting. This is a hopeful and optimistic pursuit, but the consequences are tragic.

The play is a conventional tragedy and utilises the conventions accordingly, including a plot driven by a hero afflicted by hamartia, a messenger carrying crucial plot driving information, and a chorus who carry the plot and contextualise the lives of the main characters, and the play ends in a tragic death. Although the play adheres to these traditional conventions which are usually used to tell the stories of gods and kings, Miller is very interested in the ways the conventions of tragedy can be applied to the plight of the 'everyday man'. While tragedy was usually thought of as the domain of gods and kings, Arthur Miller brought the conventions of tragedy into his writing about contemporary issues and recognisable, domestic worlds. This gives a weight and gravitas to his characters and their plight in a new and exciting way for audiences.

Joe is elevated to a king or god-like position in his community, he is well-respected and his family and neighbours go to him for advice and help. His son Chris looks up to him most obviously, he says: 'I know you're no worse than most men but I thought you were better. I never saw you as a man. I saw you as my father.' That Miller has elevated the status of Joe's character in this way, that Chris sees him as more of a god than a man, means his fall is even more tragic. The higher a character falls from, the worse the tragedy. Because of how highly regarded he is in the community and how well respected he is, it makes his crime all the more shocking and difficult to accept.

## REALISM

The Kellers, their friends and neighbours, are recognisable as real people. They use language, vernacular, and accents that are representative of real people in their place and time in history. Realism brings to the stage characters, settings, and occurrences which are familiar to audiences; real life is brought to the stage. The real world setting of the play, post-war America is depicted in a way that is historically accurate. The costume design is in the style of 1940s American fashion.

Realism allows the audience to relate to the plight of the characters, the familiarity of their world heightens the tragedy of their experience. Miller was very interested in depicting reality on stage, and refers to an interest in a 'determination to tell the truth until it hurts.' Chris's unerring insistence on telling the truth is reminiscent of Greggers in *The Wild Duck* by Henrik Ibsen, and Miller acknowledges this similarity. *The Wild Duck* is also in the style of realism, and 'Ibsen, too, committed himself to truth as an absolute value' and both plays interrogate the effects of truth and lies.



# STYLE (CONT.)

## AMERICAN DRAMA

In the middle of the 20th century, in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II, Broadway was booming. Two playwrights Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams – came to dominate the American stage. Their director of choice was Elia Kazan.

*All My Sons* was the trio's first real contact. When Kazan read the play, he had never met Miller. When Miller met Kazan, he knew he wanted him to direct it. When Williams saw the production he found the director he wanted to work with.

From there, Kazan would direct Miller's next play *Death of a Salesman*, while, for Williams, he would direct the premières of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Camino Real* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*, along with the film adaptation of *Streetcar*.

Kazan, the son of Anatolian Greeks, was born in Istanbul in 1909, his father a rug merchant. Miller, the son of Polish Jews, was born in New York in 1915, his father a coat merchant. Kazan described their commonality in his memoir: 'we could have been relatives [...] lower-middle-class neighbourhood kids with a college education who'd swung to the left'.

Williams, the son of Southern Protestants, was born in Mississippi in 1911, his father a shoe salesman. If Miller and Kazan were immigrant brothers connected by history and politics, Williams and Kazan were brothers of social and sexual rebellion. As Kazan put it, 'We were both freaks.' Still, the union seemed unlikely. In his biography of Williams, John Lahr compares the two men: 'Williams was shy, standoffish, and fragile; Kazan, on the other hand, was brash, extroverted, and powerful.' But although their temperaments differed, they shared an adventurousness and drive to change the shape of theatre.

Miller and Williams represented two distinct but related sides of resurgent American playwriting. The British critic Kenneth Tynan analogised their differences in European terms – Miller was the lucid, upright Scandinavian 'man of action', Williams the sensuous, luxuriating Mediterranean 'poet manqué'. But Miller himself felt they had more in common. Williams' homosexuality made him an outsider to the American majority in a way that resonated with Miller's leftism. 'There is a radical politics of the soul as well as of the ballot box and the picket line,' Miller wrote.

Miller had heard of Williams in 1937 when they both won college student prizes from the Theatre Guild (Miller envisioned the improbably-named man 'in buckskins, carrying a rifle'). In time, Williams' writing would serve as accelerant for Miller's own ambitions. After *All My Sons*, Kazan invited Miller up to see the early tryouts of Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Miller would return to his desk emboldened by what Williams had wrought. 'Tennessee had printed a license to speak at full throat,' Miller wrote. 'I felt speeded up, in motion now.' Williams' writing opened a specific door for Miller – to the enjoyment and liberation of words. The 'radiant eloquence' of *Streetcar* helped give birth to *Death of a Salesman*'s Willy Loman, a man full of words.

*All My Sons* came at a crucial point in Kazan's career. It premiered in New York on 29 January 1947. Later that year, Kazan would direct Gregory Peck in *Gentleman's Agreement*, which would earn him his first Academy Award for Best Director. Soon after, he co-founded The Actors Studio. And, in December of that same year, *A Streetcar Named Desire* opened on Broadway – it would run for two years. This collaboration with Williams, prompted by *All My Sons*, would ensure his enduring legacy and mystique. As Lahr describes, 'In acting, Kazan was pioneering the same unflinching interior exploration of the self that Williams' plays were attempting on the page.' *A Streetcar named Desire* launched the career of one of The Actors Studio's founding members – a 23-year-old Marlon Brando – and a method of acting whose influence, strengthened by The Actors Studio's longevity, endures to this day.

After *Death of a Salesman*, Miller and Kazan failed to collaborate again, though an unfilmed screenplay that they worked on together, *The Hook*, would filter into similar projects that they eventually pursued independently (Miller's play *A View from the Bridge* and Kazan's film *On the Waterfront*). Yet they remained close – it was Kazan who introduced Miller to Marilyn Monroe in the early 1950s. However, while Kazan and Tennessee Williams would remain lifelong friends, Miller and Kazan were soon torn apart by politics. In 1952, Kazan testified in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and named other Communist Party members in the theatre world. Miller was amongst those who never forgave him for that 'moral defection'.

# THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

Design and Model Box by Alice Babidge.  
Image: Hon Boey. ©



## SET AND COSTUME DESIGN

Of *All My Sons*, Miller said 'I wanted to write a play that would stand on the stage like a boulder that had fallen from the sky, undeniable, a fact. I had come a particular road to the point of making such a demand not only of myself but of the drama.'

The design concept reflects the directorial vision of revealing the truth. The characters are dressed in regular clothes, accurate to the post-war period in America. They provide an authentic representation of the lives of the real people of that time, which creates authenticity in the portrayal of the characters.

The set design cleverly exposes more and more of the internal world of the family as the action unfolds. Slowly, more and more of their backyard is revealed until eventually we see inside their house and thus, their inner lives and world. This

is a unique design concept which allows the audience to see inside the world of the characters. It is a symbolic way of revealing the truth.

The gradually opening set is symbolic, revealing the truth of the Keller family; as the play progresses and the truth can no longer be suppressed, so too their interior world is physically opened up more and more for the audience to see inside.

See the sketchbook resource for costume drawings!

# THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

## CHARACTER

'Characterisation is the process of developing from a role to build a complex personality and background for a particular character.'

## SYMBOL

'Symbols can help you understand and focus the drama- they can sum up the meaning of the performance, sometimes on a subconscious level.'

## TIME AND PLACE

'All dramatic action occurs at a time and place... Time affects the place and situation that characters find themselves in.'

*These definitions are from the NSW Drama syllabus.*

### TAKE YOUR CUE

For each of the following character moments, identify one intention or attitude the character was expressing, and the belief or motivation which it reflects at that moment in the play. Give evidence of their attitude- what did they say or do?

- Chris when he is cutting down the tree after interval
- Kate when she tells Bert to leave their house

### TAKE YOUR CUE

*All My Sons* uses some very key symbols to create meaning for the audience. What do the following symbols represent, and what is the meaning they convey to the audience?

- The fallen tree on the stage
- The imagined gaol in the Kellers' basement
- The movement of the set

### TAKE YOUR CUE

What is the place and time of *All My Sons*?  
How does the design of the production represent this? Give detailed examples.



# THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (CONT.)

## SPACE

'Space refers to both the shape of the stage/performance space and the spatial design contained in the performance space.'

## DRAMATIC MEANING

'Dramatic meaning is what is communicated between the performers and the audience to create an actor-audience relationship.' It is the meaning that is conveyed to the audience through the elements of drama.

### TAKE YOUR CUE

- What sort of stage is this and how does the design effectively utilise the space?
- How do actors manipulate the space, through their stage action, to create situations and build tension?
- What does the set design contribute to the story of the play? How does it serve the dramatic meaning?

### TAKE YOUR CUE

- Considering the above analysis of the themes and ideas explored in *All My Sons*, and your own experience of the play, what do you think the meaning of the play is?
- What do you think the writer and director want the audience to take away from this play?

# THE SERIOUS ISSUES

## ALL MY SONS DEALS WITH SUICIDE

This is an important issue to talk about and may be effecting your friends or peers.

Lifeline, [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au), offer lots of help and support if this effects you or someone you know.

**The following is taken from their website ([lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)) to help prevent suicide:**

### ASK

If you think someone might be suicidal, ask them directly “Are you thinking about suicide?” Don’t be afraid to do this, it shows you care and will actually decrease their risk because it shows someone is willing to talk about it. Make sure you ask directly and unambiguously.

## LISTEN AND STAY WITH THEM

If they say ‘yes’, they are suicidal, listen to them and allow them to express how they are feeling. Don’t leave them alone. Stay with them or get someone else reliable to stay with them.

### GET HELP

Get them appropriate help. Call a crisis line like Lifeline 13 11 14 or 000 if life is in danger. If you can get in straight away visit a GP or psychologist. Even if the danger is not immediate they may need longer term support for the issues that led to them feeling this way.

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