

**CELEBRATING  
100 YEARS OF MILLER**

RAPTURE THEATRE'S

**ALL MY  
SONS**

by arthur miller

**EDUCATION RESOURCE - PART TWO**

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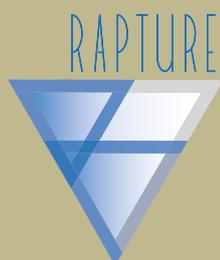
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# INTRODUCTION

This Education Resource has been produced to support Rapture Theatre's up-coming production of **All My Sons** by Arthur Miller. Part One provided educational establishments with information on how to book tickets for the show as well as details on a post-show workshop.

Part Two of the Education Resource contains background information to support teaching and learning of the play, and will be made available for download to those establishments who reserve a workshop session.



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# THE WRITER & HIS PLAY

Arthur Miller is one of the world's most critically acclaimed writers of the twentieth century and his first big success came with the play **All My Sons**.

At the heart of **All My Sons** lie the underlying themes of criticism of The American Dream, moral and social responsibility, guilt and greed and the downfall of a tragic hero figure.

The play is set just after the end of the the Second World War and many of the themes it deals with stem from real-life events and their consequences, and in some instances how those events not only shaped the characters within the play, but in fact impacted on Miller's life itself.

Miller's own family lost their wealth and status as a consequence of the Wall Street Crash, ultimately shattering their own personal version of The American Dream, something that Miller would write about continually throughout his working life.

In this resource you will find information about 4 of the overarching background themes which lend structure to what Miller was inspired by when writing **All My Sons**. The more direct themes found within the play including Guilt & Blame, Money, Money, Money, Lies & Deceit, Justice & Judgement, Courage, Family and Memories of the Past will be studied further during the workshop sessions.



# THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The Great Depression was probably the most profound and longest lasting economic crisis to ever hit in the industrialised western world's history. It began in the United States in October 1929, soon after the Wall Street stock market crash. It's impact lasted until 1939, which of course was the beginning of the Second World War in Europe. Millions of people lost their investments and unemployment was immense. Many of the country's banks collapsed and went into liquidation (sound familiar?)

In the wake of the stock market crash consumer spending and investment diminished, leading to factories and businesses having to slow down, and in some instances halt production, with the result that they then had to resort to laying off their workers.

The impact of the Depression was felt around the world, especially in Europe.

Despite reassurances from President Hoover and his government that the crisis would run its course, things steadily continued to get worse. Farmers struggled to afford to harvest their crops, being forced to leave them to rot in the fields, causing supplies across the country to be scarce and resulting in wide spread starvation.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president in the 1932 election. He took immediate action to address the crisis. During his first 100 days in office, he and his administration passed legislation aimed at stabilising the recovery of the economy, creating jobs and increasing industrial and agricultural production. One way in which he did this was to set up, in 1935, the Works Project Administration (WPA). This was a permanent jobs program, and throughout its eight years of existence gave employment to some 8.5 million Americans.

From the spring of 1933 the economy began to steadily recover and improve across the next three years. However, in 1937 the country was hit by another sharp recession. It began to improve once again by 1938.

Depression-era hardships across the western world incited the rise in extremist political movements most notably in Germany, with Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party. As war broke out in Europe the WPA was tasked with strengthening the U.S.'s military infrastructure, even although they continued to maintain neutrality until 1942. Industrial production soared.

When the Great Depression hit in 1929, the U.S. was the only industrialised country in the world without some form of unemployment insurance or social security, this was changed in 1935 when Congress passed the Social Security Act, providing Americans with unemployment, disability and pension benefits for the first time ever.

## Questions to consider:

1. For those who lived through the Great Depression, what would you consider their fears for the future might be?
2. When factories were given the opportunity to manufacture parts and machinery for the military, how do you think they reacted to this, after having suffered such economic hardships previously?

# THE AMERICAN DREAM

“The American Dream.” What exactly does this mean? An ideology of 1950s Americana, Mom in her apron and heels, slaving over a hot stove, waiting patiently on Dad and the kids to return home to their perfect white-picket fenced home, or is it to make as much money as you possibly can, if only you work hard enough – the “rags to riches” story? Some may think so, but in actuality it means different things to different people.

The American Dream is a standards code of ideals, encompassing freedom, opportunity, prosperity and success, available to every single American.

The phrase itself was first used by American historian James Truslow Adams in his 1931 publication “The Epic of America”, stating that The American Dream is “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement... it is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.”

However, most Americans believe that the ethos behind The American Dream has its roots in the Declaration of Independence and the forming of the American Constitution. The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal and that they are endowed with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness”. This ‘Dream’ has fueled the hopes and aspirations for generations of Americans, not as self-indulgence but as fair ambition and creative drive.

Over time, however, this simple notion has been skewed into something more: a strong desire for consumer expectations. The want of a prosperous lifestyle: to own your home, a car, all the latest gadgets, send your children to the best college and then ultimately enjoy a comfortable and well-off retirement.

In times of austerity, such as during The Great Depression, when economic instability leads to poverty and unemployment, the people need to hold onto a strength of mind which conjures better, more affluent times for the future. The American Dream provides a hopeful expectation for those times to arrive.

The American Dream is also held to justification on issues such as civil rights, equality and peace. The United States of America is a country formed essentially by migrants, and its citizens are schooled in the philosophy of it being a free country administered by a “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. An ideology to be admired. However, these ideals are not always adhered to, as can be seen through its peppered history of inequality, segregation and racism.

So, can The American Dream really truly be defined?

## Questions to consider:

1. Many of the characters in *All My Sons* are obsessed with the pursuit of wealth, which they equate to stability and happiness. Is this quest of “The American Dream” justified?
2. Discuss the issue of inequality, particularly in terms of gender and social standing.

# POST WWII IN THE USA

World War II was possibly the biggest military struggle of our time. Men from more than 50 countries fought in the war and the entire world felt its effects.

When Britain and France declared war on Germany in 1939 after its invasion of Poland, the United States hoped to stay out of the conflict, maintaining a degree of neutrality. However, President Roosevelt recognized the need for preparation and expanded the country's armed forces and increased production on defense weapons.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese, part of the Axis forces, attacked a major US naval base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii, which consequently resulted in Congress declaring war on Japan. This in turn prompted Germany and the other Axis powers to declare war on the United States.

WWII finally ended in 1945. Life in the US began to return to normal. The War had provided the US with economic stability, unlike its European counterparts, whose countries were devastated both physically and financially.

Society became more affluent in the postwar years, creating a sense of optimism and confidence. The introduction of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, 1944, more commonly known as the GI Bill allowed many, who previously may not have been able to afford it, the opportunity to attend university. However, for many of its soldiers and military personnel, postwar life was far from ideal.

Jobs were difficult to come by, having been filled by women and minority workforces during the war. Another issue was post-traumatic stress, with many men suffering flashbacks and nightmares as a result of the atrocities they witnessed on the battlefields. Others suffered from "survivors guilt", a psychological term originally coined in the 1960s to describe survivors of the Holocaust who felt they weren't entitled to happiness or wealth after the trauma of the concentration camps, but in this instance designating a condition stemming from those who perceived themselves lucky enough to be able to return home having survived enemy attacks while witnessing the deaths of many colleagues and friends during the combat. Others returned home to find their children unsure of, or resentful towards, their father's homecoming. Post-war America saw an upward spiral in the increase of alcoholism and divorce rates.

Other changes also began to occur throughout the postwar years. The Soviet Union's push for power in Europe led to the beginning of the "Cold War" era and the fight for civil rights, particularly within the Black and Hispanic communities, many of whom had fought for the country, returning to a home nation still less than welcoming, gained momentum and expansion across the country.

## **Questions to consider:**

1. Looking at the younger and older generations within *All My Sons*, consider the differences of how WWII impacted on their lives. Is it the same or different?

# A GREEK TRAGEDY

“I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his ‘rightful’ position in his society.”

Arthur Miller

Many of Arthur Miller’s plays contain parallels to the classic Greek Tragedy dramas: **All My Sons**, **Death of A Salesman** and **A View from the Bridge**. In the classic Greek Tragedy, the ‘hero’ usually manifests a destructive personality, which ultimately forces him to commit a serious and irrevocable wrongdoing. The hero’s journey throughout the play is then normally marked by denial, suffering and loneliness, after which only death can restore the moral order of society and a ‘freedom’ for those other characters entangled in the original deceit.

The protagonist of **All My Sons** is Joe Keller, a pillar within the community and the boss of a successful business, yet he is flawed but not unsympathetic. He is obsessed by the ideal of The American Dream, to be seen as successful, make money and provide for his loving family. Ultimately, it is this flaw and his lack of accepting responsibility for his actions that lead to his downfall.

“All My Sons contains elements of Greek tragedy not only in its retroactive structures but also in a story that at times evokes Aeschylus’s Oresteia and Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex. Joe Keller can be viewed as a king whose hands are stained with a son’s blood, and Kate Keller as a Queen who is suspended between shielding her husband and destroying him for love of a son. ... The Oedipal theme is carried further in Chris’s behaviour toward his parents and the terrifying mix of love, protection and vengeance in Mrs Keller. Likewise Ann, George and their absent father might be viewed as the opposite of the Kellers, an ill-used and wrongfully deposed royal family of three; in their own way they are similar to Ophelia, Laertes and Polonius of Hamlet, another play with Greek overtones.”

“Arthur Miller: His Life and Work,” by Martin Gottfried

Other great Tragic Heroes within literature include:

- Antigone
- Othello
- King Lear
- Hamlet
- Oedipus
- Dr Faustus
- Captain Ahab
- Jay Gatsby

# WORKSHOP THEMES

The workshop that has been developed to support Rapture's production of **All My Sons** will comprise of small groups working with the director to devise a short scene featuring the play's characters in a scenario which does not actually take place within the script, but may have, or most certainly would have, taken place. The following are a series of questions and statements which may help to form a better understanding of the themes which will be explored within the devising process.

## 1. **Guilt & Blame**

- They clearly suspect/know he is guilty, so why doesn't the community confront Joe about it? Do strong Capitalist values allow him to literally 'get away with murder'.
- Survivor's Guilt - Chris feels guilty about coming home from the war alive, when the other men in his unit didn't.
- Joe blames the decision to send out faulty goods on his business partner Steve.

## 2. **Money, Money Money!**

- This community lived through the Great Depression. Is this reason to crave money and wealth?
- The Doctor's wife is always eager for him to make more money by taking on more housecalls.
- Joe's war profiteering.
- Chris claims to abhor 'big business' yet when Ann agrees to marry him he tells her that he "wants to make a fortune" for her. A contradiction in terms?
- A Capitalist Culture vs Morality. Can they co-exist?

## 3. **Justice & Judgement**

- Compare what happened to Joe and Steve after the trial. One continues to accumulate wealth and prestige, the other goes to jail, losing the support and respect of his family and neighbours.
- Is justice served by Joe's death? Or are there others (complicit in his guilt) still left unpunished?

## 4. **Lies & Deceit**

- There are various shades of deceit throughout the story of All My Sons including outright lies, complicit silence and self-deception - all the characters are guilty of one or more of these things. Is there one honest character within the play?
- Kate deceives herself with the belief that her elder son Larry will still come home after all this time. If she admits that he's dead then ultimately she is admitting to her husband's guilt.

## 5. **Memories of the Past**

- A lot of the characters refuse to acknowledge the past, but it slowly reveals itself through the arrival of an old neighbour, a telephone call from prison and a letter from a dead son.
- What is the significance of the 'tree' in the staging? What was its original purpose, what does its destruction represent and what is Miller trying to say when Chris begins to chop up its remains?

## 6. **Family**

- The title of the play suggests family. Why has Miller chosen this as his title?
- Four families feature within the play.
- New families are being planned - the marriage of Chris & Ann.

## 7. **Courage**

- Each character has a different image of what courage looks like. For example, Joe - protection of his family at all costs. Chris - self-sacrifice and Ann - perseverance.
- Suicide - a brave apology or ultimate cowardice?
- Why is Chris afraid to acknowledge his father's guilt?
- Are the women in the play more courageous than the men?

# MEET THE CAST



Paul Shelley



Trudie Goodwin



Robbie Jack



Michael Moreland



Bryony Afferson



David Tarkenter



Lyn McAndrew



Steven Scott-Fitzgerald



Pauline Turner

Cast List:	
<b>JOE KELLER</b>	Paul Shelley
<b>KATE KELLER</b>	Trudie Goodwin
<b>CHRIS KELLER</b>	Robbie Jack
<b>ANN DEEVER</b>	Bryony Afferson
<b>GEORGE DEEVER</b>	Michael Moreland
<b>DR JIM BAYLISS</b>	David Tarkenter
<b>SUE BAYLISS</b>	Lyn McAndrew
<b>FRANK LUBEY</b>	Steven Scott-Fitzgerald
<b>LYDIA LUBEY</b>	Pauline Turner

Click on the image below to watch a video of the cast and director talk about **All My Sons**.