

# 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.
- Is family ever used as an excuse for a character's actions?

## 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?

# TIMELINES

## Timeline of the play:

### Act One

Sunday Morning, August 1947

### Act Two

Twilight on Sunday Evening, August 1947

### Act Three

Two am the next morning, August 1947

## Timeline leading up to the Play:

### Early Autumn, 1943

Joe tells Steve Deever to patch faulty plane parts and send them out.

### Late Autumn, 1943

Twenty-one planes crash. The faulty parts are discovered. Joe and Steve are arrested.

### November 1943

Larry writes a letter to Ann where he reveals he knows about the arrests and plans to crash his plane.

### November 25, 1943

Larry is reported missing.

### 1944

Joe is successful in his appeal. He is released from jail.

### 1945

Joe's plant rebounds to become one of the most successful in the state.

### 1945

Chris starts writing to Ann Deever.

### Saturday, August 1947

Larry's memorial tree blows down in a storm.

### Sunday, August 1947

The Play begins.

# CHARACTER SYNOPSIS

## JOE KELLER



- Approx. 60 years old
- Prosperous businessman
- Exonerated of causing the deaths of 21 pilots by knowingly shipping faulty aircraft cylinder heads from his factory
- Eventually comes to terms with his responsibility in the pilot's deaths

## KATE KELLER



- Early 50s
- In denial about Larry's death
- Suffers from headaches and nightmares
- Believes Ann is still "Larry's Girl"

## CHRIS KELLER



- 32 years old
- War hero
- Lives comfortably, but guiltily, on his father's money
- Portrayed as idealistic, but is he?
- Wants to marry Ann
- Sometimes lives in 'the shadow' of his older idolized brother, Larry

## ANN DEEVER



- 26 years old
- Many of the other characters often refer to her beauty.
- Shunned her father after he goes to jail for his crimes
- Lives in New York, returned to her hometown with the expectation of a proposal from Chris
- Happy to spend a week's wages on new clothes

# character synopsis cont'd

## GEORGE DEEVER



- 32 years old
- On the edge of self-restraint throughout the play
- His arrival is the catalyst that sets off events in the 2nd act
- Wants to stop Ann from marrying into the Keller family when he discovers the truth after visiting his father in jail

## DR JIM BAYLISS



- Nearly 40
- Self-effacing humour (but with a whiff of sadness attached)
- Self-controlled
- Wants to become a medical researcher, but continues in his job as it pays the bills
- Has a son Tommy who is mentioned as being a friend of Bert's

## SUE BAYLISS



- Around 40ish
- Overweight (self-conscious of the fact)
- Can be scathing of others, probably due to her own insecurities
- Eager for her husband to make more and more money

## FRANK LUBEY



- 33 years old
- Pleasant
- Opinionated (but usually ignored/dismissed)
- Uncertain of himself (tending to be peevish if crossed)
- Has an interest in astrology
- Always one year ahead of the draft, so never served in WWII

# character synopsis cont'd

## LYDIA LUBEY



- Robust, cheery
- 27 yrs old
- Former sweetheart of George Deever – why did she not marry him?
- Has three children

## BERT



- Neighbourhood boy
- Plays 'Cops & Robbers' games with Joe (which Kate is not happy about)

## STEVE DEEVER (UNSEEN)

- Joe's business partner and former neighbour
- Father of Ann & George
- Serving time in jail for his part in the shipment of faulty goods from Joe's factory
- How innocent is he?

## LARRY KELLER (UNSEEN)

- Officially 'Missing in Action'
- Idolised by his parents, but for different reasons
- Acknowledges his father guilt
- Ashamed of his father's crime he killed himself
- Writes a suicide note to Ann, which is read near the end of the play

# DEVISE A SCENE

## **Guilt & Blame**

- We eventually learn that Kate has known Joe was guilty of sending the faulty cylinder heads out for distribution but do you think she knew about it at the time? Was she present when Joe spoke with Steve on the telephone? Do you think she encouraged him to go through with it? Decide if you agree or disagree with these statements and devise a conversation, which might have taken place during this occasion.
- Devise a scene where the neighbours are discussing Joe's guilt. Why do they decide to keep quiet about their suspicions?
- Devise a scene of your own which may have occurred prior to or after the day in which the play *All My Sons* is set using the theme of "Guilt & Blame" as inspiration.

# DEVISE A SCENE

## **Money, Money Money!**

- After Joe's suicide, will Chris take over the family business? How would his mother and Ann feel about this? What would the reaction be from the rest of the community?
- In order to placate his wife Sue, and make money to "pay the bills", Dr Jim Bayliss has put aside his ambition of working within medical research. Devise a scene where Jim (after realizing the futility of the life he has chosen through Joe's death) decides he is going to give up his job as a GP and go into research. What is his wife Sue's reaction to this?
- Devise a scene of your own which may have occurred prior to or after the day in which the play *All My Sons* is set using the theme of "Money, Money Money!" as inspiration.

# DEVISE A SCENE

## **Justice & Judgement**

- Devise a scene that might have taken place during the trial where Joe and Steve meet accidentally. What was said between them?
- Ann brings ‘the letter’ from Larry with her, has she come seeking revenge? And why does George give up on his quest for vengeance – is he lulled by the charms of the Kellers or has he spoken with his sister about the letter? Bring this scene to life.
- How does Steve discover about Joe’s exoneration, what is his reaction?
- Devise a scene of your own which may have occurred prior to or after the day in which the play *All My Sons* is set using the theme of “Justice & Judgement” as inspiration.



# DEVISE A SCENE

## Lies & Deceit

- Devise a scene where Kate is talking to her self about Larry. Possibly another character comes in and interrupts her, have they heard what she was saying, how would she cover up her ramblings?
- Devise a scene between Joe and Steve alone in a prison cell (creating their defense).
- Devise a scen where Kate talks about Larry MIA for the first time. Is it a rehearsed speech or something she creates on the spot?
- Devise a scene of your own which may have occurred prior to or after the day in which the play All My Sons is set using the theme of “Lies & Deceit” as inspiration.

# DEVISE A SCENE

## **Memories of the Past**

- How would the remaining characters memorialise Joe after his suicide? Devise a scene between them, which takes places several days after his funeral. Have their opinions of him changed, or does his reputation still remain untarnished?
- Chris, George and Ann talk about their past on the day of Joe's funeral (is Steve still in jail?)
- Devise a scene of your own which may have occurred prior to or after the day in which the play All My Sons is set using the theme of "Memories of the Past" as inspiration.

# DEVISE A SCENE

## Family

- The Keller and Deever children played together when they were young. Devise a scene between the 4 of them, which might hint at what was to happen to them in the future. Miller uses this structure throughout the play, giving subtle small hints at what is to happen by things that are said beforehand.
  - a. when they are 8-11 yrs old
  - b. just before the start of WWII
- Devise the scene of a family picnic between the Keller and the Deever families. (Do we finally get to meet the Deever Mother?)
- Devise a scene of your own which may have occurred prior to or after the day in which the play *All My Sons* is set using the theme of “Family” as inspiration.

# DEVISE A SCENE

## Courage

- Devise a split scene – both father and son commit suicide because of Joe’s actions. Neither deaths are shown on stage, but we have to imagine that the extreme decision to end their lives was something they debated with their own conscience. What was going through their minds when they made that decision?
- What does George do once he leaves the Keller home, knowing the truth.
- Is Kate courageous in how she runs her household? Does she make decisions based on courage or cowardice?
- Ann moving to New York. Was it a difficult decision? What would life be like as a single woman in the big city?
- Devise a scene of your own which may have occurred prior to or after the day in which the play All My Sons is set using the theme of “Courage” as inspiration.