

InsideOUT

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ALL MY Sons

By Arthur Miller

JOE KELLER: Sure, he [Larry] was my son. But I think to him they were all my sons. And I guess they were...

—*All My Sons*

Illustration by Scott McKowen

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Synopsis

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During World War II, Joe Keller and his partner, Steve Deever, manufactured airplane parts. Because of the necessity for speed in delivering the product, some of their plane cylinder heads were defective and caused the deaths of many young pilots. As a result of a lie, Deever goes to prison, but Joe is exonerated and lives to gain material wealth. Keller has two sons: Larry, a pilot declared missing for three years, and Chris, recently returned from combat. Chris and Ann Deever, Larry's former fiancée and daughter of Joe's partner, intend to marry in spite of the resistance of Chris's mother, Kate Keller, who believes Larry is still alive. Kate's attitude is based on the suspicion of Joe's guilt in the deaths of the pilots, but she will not concede that Larry could have been one of them. Chris, the idealist, loves and admires his father and desperately tries to believe in his innocence until he can no longer do so and live with himself.

In this, his first successful play, Arthur Miller examines the social conscience and ethics of an American family trying to achieve the American dream.

Joe Keller's trouble, in a word, is not that he cannot tell right from wrong, but that his cast of mind cannot admit that he, personally, has any visible connection with his world, his universe or his society.

—Arthur Miller,
Introduction to Collected Plays, Volume I.

The Playwright

Arthur Miller was born to a moderately wealthy Polish-Jewish immigrant family in Brooklyn on October 15, 1915. His father, Isadore, was an illiterate but successful women's clothing manufacturer; his mother, Augusta, was a housewife and teacher. He had two older siblings: Kermit and Joan, who became an actress and appeared in some of her brother's works. Miller remembered he and his siblings being driven to school by a chauffeur, but when Isadore was ruined in the Great Depression, the family was forced to move to Harlem. Eventually, Isadore rebounded as a hat manufacturer.

Miller attended PS 24 in Harlem from 1920 to 1928 and saw his first play (a melodrama) in 1923 at the Shubert Theatre. At Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, he was a talented athlete but mediocre student. As a result, he was rejected by both the University of Michigan and Cornell. After graduating high school, he read the works of Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoevsky and worked at an auto parts warehouse to make money for college. At the warehouse he experienced a great deal of anti-Semitism, which would influence some of his later works (especially *A Memory of Two Mondays*.) In 1934 he reapplied to the University of Michigan and was accepted.

At Michigan Miller studied journalism and drama, becoming particularly interested in the ancient Greek dramas and the works of Henrik Ibsen. During spring break in 1936 (his sophomore year), he wrote his first work, *Honors at Dawn*, and won a \$250 prize. The play centered around a strike and the main character's inability to express himself; it won an Avery Hopwood Award, the first of two he received. Miller retained strong ties to his Alma Mater throughout his life, establishing the

Arthur Miller Award in 1985, the Arthur Miller Award for Dramatic Writing in 1999 and lending his name to the theatre in the forthcoming Walgreen Drama Center.

"I still feel—kind of temporary about myself," Willy Loman says to his brother Ben (in *Death of a Salesman*)... It summed up my own condition then and throughout my life.

—Arthur Miller, *Timebends*

The University also honored its distinguished alumnus with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters in 1956 and several tributes and symposia on his frequent returns to Ann Arbor.

In 1938, Miller received his bachelor's degree in English. In 1940 he married his college sweetheart, Mary Slattery, with whom he had two children, Jane and Robert. He was exempted from military service in World War II because of a football injury.

In 1944 he toured army camps gathering material for a screenplay, *The Story of G. I. Joe* and a book, *Situation Normal*. His first Broadway play, *The Man who Had All the Luck*, closed after four performances. In 1945 he published his first novel, *Focus*, about anti-Semitism.

Miller began working on *All My Sons* in 1944. The failure of his first Broadway play made him doubt his own abilities and he had decided that if his new play was not well-received, he would go into another line of work. *All My Sons* opened on Broadway in 1947 and won the

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New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Miller auctioned off the manuscript of his play and became involved in a variety of anti-Fascist and pro-Communist activities.

Miller's 1949 play, *Death of a Salesman* won the Pulitzer Prize and three Tony Awards as well as the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award; it was the first play to win all three. In 1953, *The Crucible* opened in New York to mixed reviews. Based upon the Salem Witch Trials, the play was a veiled attack on Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee.

In 1956 Miller divorced his wife, Mary, and in June of that year he married Marilyn Monroe, the blonde bombshell of the cinema. That same year he appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee and admitted he attended Communist Party meetings along with his director friend, Elia Kazan. However, he refused to reveal the names of members of a literary circle suspected of Communist affiliations. As a result, he was found guilty of contempt of Congress in 1957, but his conviction was reversed by the United States Court of Appeals in 1958. That same year he wrote a screenplay and filming began on *The Misfits*, which starred his wife, Marilyn Monroe.

Unfortunately, the Miller-Monroe marriage did not last and Monroe was granted a Mexican divorce in 1961. In 1962 Miller married Inge Morath, a photographer he had met on the set of *The Misfits*. They had two children, Rebecca and Daniel. Supposedly, Daniel was born with Down Syndrome and was institutionalized in Connecticut, but Miller never mentioned him in his autobiography, *Timebends* (1987).

Rebecca is a writer/director/actor married to Daniel Day-Lewis, the film actor. Inge Morath died in 2002.

After a period in the 1970s and 80s when Miller fell out of favor with New York critics, his star rose again in the 1990s with revivals of *A View from the Bridge*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Price* and *The Crucible*. Mr. Miller's last

work, *Finishing the Picture*, had its premiere in 2004 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago.

Arthur Miller was Jewish. Though he never observed it formally, it is a significant force in his plays. Christopher Bigsby, author of several books about Miller, believes the Holocaust and the Great Depression were the major influences on Miller's writing. The Depression would leave him with lessons about "the familiar world dissolving, leaving only the necessities of survival." The Holocaust is the subject of his plays, *After the Fall*, *Incident at Vichy* and *Broken Glass*.

Arthur Miller died February 10, 2005, and the lights on Broadway were dimmed in his honor.

About a year ago Arthur Miller paid me a great compliment. He said my plays were 'necessary.' I will go one step further and say that Arthur's plays are essential .

—Edward Albee, playwright,
February 11, 2005

Works

Plays

Honors at Dawn (1935)
No Villain: They Too Arise (1937)
The Golden Years (1940)
The Man Who Had All the Luck (1944)
All My Sons (1947)
Death of a Salesman (1949)
The Crucible (1953)
A Memory of Two Mondays (1955)
A View from the Bridge (1955)
After the Fall (1964)
Incident at Vichy (1965)
The Price (1968)
The Creation of the World and Other Business
(1972)
The Archbishop's Ceiling (1977)
The American Clock (1981)
Elegy for a Lady (1982)
Some Kind of Love Story (1982)
Danger: Memory! Two Plays - I Can't
Remember Anything and Clara (1986)
The Ride Down Mt. Morgan (1991)
The Last Yankee (1993)
Broken Glass (1994)
Mr. Peters' Connections (1998)
The Ryan Interview (2000)
Resurrection Blues (2004)
Finishing the Picture (2004)

Screenplays

The Misfits (1961)
An Enemy of the People—adaptation of Henrik
Ibsen's play (1966)

Paramount Themes in ALL MY Sons

On the surface the plot of *All My Sons* can be easily summarized, but the themes of the play are many and complex. As Christopher Bigsby observes, the play is about “betrayal, about America, about father-son relationships, about self-righteousness, about a fear of mortality, about guilt, about domestic life as evasion, about money...”¹

Ultimately the play’s central theme is social responsibility and the ability to connect with the world around us, both close and distant. Joe Keller, in allowing defective airplane parts to be shipped, is responsible for 21 deaths. But so long as Joe acts to preserve the welfare of his family, he believes that anything he does can be justified. The sole responsibility in his life, in his view, is to be successful so that he can support his wife and children. He sees his life as a triumph over adversity—his lack of education, his deprived childhood, the effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s—and he believes he deserves the material wealth he has accumulated.

In the opening scene, Joe is reading the newspaper help wanted ads, but not the news. This suggests his disengagement from the world or, at least the reluctance to discover what’s going on in the world. Joe’s viewpoint is somewhat akin to the isolationists who opposed America’s participation in World War II—suggesting that it was best to look after one’s own rather than to engage with other countries. Even the set reflects an isolation: “the stage is hedged on right and left by tall closely planted poplars which lend the yard a secluded atmosphere.”

The second major theme is the effects of repression and self-denial—or as Miller termed it “the paradox of denial.”² Joe Keller’s crimes against society “derive from the instinct for self-preservation and self assertion that foster

the adoption of a counterfeit innocence and the illusion of one’s being a victim of others.”³ Joe, in fact, sees himself as a victim. Instead of

CHRIS: You can be better!
Once and for all you can know
there’s a universe of people
outside and you’re responsible
to it...

—*All My Sons*

acknowledging his complicity in the production of defective parts, he lies about his involvement and denies his guilt so that he can maintain the false picture of himself as a successful man with a rightful place in society. His denial is paradoxical in that it sets forth the chain of events that finally destroy him.

Kate Keller, too, is in denial. Not only does she insist that Larry is still alive, she believes everything must remain as it was before Larry left. Chris can’t marry Ann; Joe must stay incompetent but charming, and if Larry is dead, only then will Joe be guilty. Her obsession with Larry makes her disregard her other son, Chris, and his wants and needs.

Chris sees himself as an idealist, but he is also in denial. He wants his mother to acknowledge Larry’s death, not to make her suffer, but to get her blessing to marry Ann Deever. He says he is going to make fortunes for Ann, yet he professes a disdain for money and the business. He says his father is a man among men, but must feel some resentment toward Joe as he drives him to the crisis point. As a returned veteran of combat, he may suffer from survivor guilt, but

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by destroying his father, he can expiate his own guilt for believing in Joe—and returning safely from the war.

Other characters disavow their circumstances. Ann says her father was responsible for the defective plane parts, but she carries the letter from Larry that explains the circumstances of his death. Dr. Bayliss, the neighbor, has a lucrative medical practice to please his wife, but would rather be doing research, which pays much less. He also tries to shield Chris from the truth, so he can preserve the illusion of this perfect, loving family. Even the absent Larry is complicit. Knowing of his father's guilt, he prefers to crash his plane rather than to return home and bear the shame and humiliation of his father's crime.

“The Kellers, and many of those around them, choose to blame everyone else for their dilemmas, but only they are the authors of their destinies—and their failure to accept the tremendous burden of their freedom and responsibility is itself the cause of their personal tragedies.”⁴

Literary INFLUENCES on ARTHUR Miller

A major influence upon Miller were the plays of Henrik Ibsen which he read while attending the University of Michigan. Ibsen was one of the earliest of the “realistic” playwrights and his characters speak what is on their minds and believe they can shape their own destinies. For example, Nora of *A Doll’s House* leaves her husband and family when she realizes that she has been living a lie and must find the real woman within her. Ibsen’s plays stress objective reality, not only through character, but through the set and lighting, as do Miller’s. In *All My Sons* the set is the backyard of a middle class family and the lighting reflects the basic mood of each act. In the first act the sun shines brightly as Chris and Ann discuss their wedding; in the second act the mood darkens to twilight; in the third act it is two o’clock in the morning and a “bluish light” casts a shadow

upon characters whose lives are growing darker. Finally, the broken tree is a realistic reminder—or symbol—of Larry’s death and the coming “break” of the family.

Ibsen also had a structural influence on Miller’s plays. In Ibsen, an act that happened in the past comes to life in the present and creates drama. As Miller expressed it: “Ibsen’s insistence upon valid causation solved the problem of how to dramatize what has gone before.... That is the ‘real’ in Ibsen’s realism for me.”¹ For Miller, realism meant facing facts and being pragmatic.

Ibsen’s plays are concerned with social issues such as women’s rights (*A Doll’s House*), social pretensions and pride (*Pillars of Society*), and

the evils of political hypocrisy (*An Enemy of the People*). Miller’s plays deal with similar modern problems.

All My Sons concerns a selfish, materialistic society that respects only material success; *Death of a Salesman* emphasizes these same social forces as a source of tragedy, and *The Crucible* uses the Salem witch trials as a metaphor for Senator Joseph McCarthy’s oppressive hunt for Communists in the literary and entertainment worlds in the 1950s.

The Greek tragedies held a fascination for Miller. While Aristotle’s *Poetics* maintained that tragedies were the province of aristocrats,

Look into any man’s heart you please, and you will always find, in everyone, at least one black spot which he has to keep concealed.

—Henrik Ibsen. *Pillars of Society*

Miller wrote an essay on “Tragedy and the Common Man.” He believed the tragic struggle is that of an individual attempting to gain his rightful place in society. “The function of tragedy is to reveal the truth concerning our society, which frustrates

and denies man the right to personal dignity.”² But when a man’s actions violate some law of society, that is when tragedy occurs. The great achievement of the Greeks, as Miller saw it, was the combination of the psychological and the social—to teach man the right way to live.

Martin Gottfried in his book on Arthur Miller compares *All My Sons* to Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*. Joe Keller can be viewed as a king whose hands are stained with a son’s blood, while Kate Keller is the queen who is torn between shielding her husband and destroying him for love of a son. The Oedipal theme is carried further by Chris’s behavior toward his father (love and resentment) and the mix of love, protection and vengeance in Kate.

ALL MY *Sons*: A Social TRAGEDY

“Arthur Miller—has attempted to make society a force powerful enough to instigate tragic action and to evoke tragic feelings” writes Santosh K. Bhatia in his book *Arthur Miller: Social Drama as Tragedy*.¹ Miller accomplishes this feat by subordinating social protest to character analysis and psychological motivation, and by understanding the moral nature of the issues involved. He also uses realistic themes and social issues as a background to project human passions and emotions.

In his essay “On Social Plays,” Miller wrote that “social drama is not merely an arraignment of society’s evils.”² He also maintained that the psychological life of man is linked to his social existence and that the two cannot be separated in a tragedy. In addition, the problem Miller explores in his plays is the same one the ancient Greek writers wrestled with: How are we to live? “...From what ultimate source are we to derive a standard of values that will create in man a respect for himself, a real voice in the fate of his society and, above all, in aim for life.”³

A typical Miller tragedy usually has only four or five characters; *The Crucible* is an exception with 20. In his plays, social forces as well as the individual’s guilt precipitate the crisis; thus, the basic conflict is between the individual and society. Joe Keller is characteristic of this concept. In *All My Sons* Joe’s private guilt is matched against the social evil he has committed. Joe cannot see beyond his own family; in caring too much for them and their prosperity, he jeopardizes the safety and security of society at large. But he is a product of this society as well as being its enemy. “His mind and psychology are shaped and distorted by the capitalistic economic system and the chief motivating force behind his shortsightedness is the success-code of the society which he thoughtlessly follows.”⁴

In terms of the Greek tragedies, that individual was to be at one with his society; Joe’s tragedy is that he is not.

Joe is an uneducated and unimaginative businessman; therefore, his actions have to be judged in accordance with his background. The fear of losing his business and becoming a failure plus his overwhelming love for his family cause him to act as he does.

His conflict with Chris is a variation of the clash between the familial and the social. The confrontation between them springs from Chris’s awareness of responsibility and Joe’s lack of it.

The most interesting feature of the play is how an anti-social character is treated as a tragic hero. Miller focuses on Joe’s human aspect as against his commercial side so the audience does not completely lose sympathy for him. All through the play we are aware that Joe’s anti-social acts have behind them the motivation of a father’s love for his sons.

In *All My Sons*, Miller raises larger social issues and questions of choice, responsibility, justice and morality. In dealing with man’s place and role in society, Miller asks the question posed by the ancient Greek playwrights: how are we to live?

Herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor—all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked—who is good?

Not that men are ignorant—what is truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men.

—William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.
The Souls of Black Folk

War PROFITEERING: *A Short HISTORY*

Profitteering in wartime is a recurrent act that can be traced back to the earliest civilizations. Whenever mobilization for war occurs, there is an opportunity to make enormous profits. Joe Keller makes money in his business, but, in doing so, kills innocent men.

During the Intercolonial Wars, which lasted from the late 1600s until 1762, the conflicts raged between England, France and Spain over which colonial power would control the North American continent. The combatants reverted to ancient European methods of looting, pillaging and the sacking of villages, particularly Native American ones, and clung to the idea that this land was theirs. At about the same time, the more enduring patterns of profiteering we know today began to emerge. Governors and military commanders began to give the profitable military supply “contracts” to their friends and relatives and some took kickbacks. “Late delivery, no delivery and delivery of inferior goods were common and helped decide a number of battles...”¹

In the years before the American Revolution, England took as much profit as possible out of the colonies to defray the cost of the Seven Years’ War against the French. The colonists saw English taxes for what they were—imperial tribute—and refused to pay them. Benjamin Franklin accused the British of profiteering from “useless expeditions” and wrote that “Governors often come to the Colonies merely to make fortunes.”²

But the tables turned during the American Revolution. Yankee ingenuity and business enterprise led to the realization that one could get rich in wartime. It was a time for speculation and overcharging even at the expense of the soldiers at Valley Forge, who were starving and cold while fat merchants ate and drank well in

nearby Philadelphia. High government officials such as Samuel Chase, a member of Congress from Maryland, tried to corner the market on

What has a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

—Matthew 16:26

flour. When the incident was revealed, the Maryland legislature prohibited merchants from serving in Congress. Another master profiteer was Robert Morris, the Pennsylvania signer of the Declaration of Independence. As Chairman of the Committees of Congress overseeing finances and government purchasing and later as Superintendent of Finance, he was at the hub of schemes and relationships in which he acted for his own personal gain. “He exported and imported, fitted out and employed ships—used his bank in Paris for government transactions, had his friends appointed to important government posts and awarded contracts to himself and his partners...”³ Fearing the loss of speculative profits, he even urged continuing the Revolutionary War on the basis that the country needed “a more strongly knit Confederation.”⁴

During the Civil War more men and materials were needed, so opportunities for pocketing public money were increased. One of the most egregious profiteers was the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, who was involved in a number of sordid transactions. After disclosures were made in congressional hearings, President Lincoln dismissed him from office. Business tycoons and 19th-century American capitalists acquired the beginning of their fortunes dur-

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ing the Civil War. Men such as J. P. Morgan, Philip Armour, Clement Studebaker, Cornelius Vanderbilt and Andrew Carnegie benefited from investment privileges, land grants, railroad subsidies and military construction.

In the Spanish-American War at the end of the 19th century, more modern advanced weapon systems came into play, including the gigantic, expensive, steel-plated, steam-propelled, heavily armed warship. Such advanced weapon systems required large sums of money for manpower and materials as well as long lead times for planning and co-ordination so that the numerous components could be produced and brought together at the right time. When so many people are involved, the opportunity for profiteering is multiplied.

In 1896 Congress investigated the two sole manufacturers of armor plate for warships, the Carnegie Steel Company and the Bethlehem Steel Company. Bethlehem was charging the US Navy more than 200% the price being charged the Russian government. Both companies denied they were making excessive profits and Andrew Carnegie testified the only reason he was in the armor-plate business was out of patriotism. Both companies refused to let the government inspect their books for excessive profits and both refused to sell armor plate for a fixed price. Pressed by the requirements of war, Congress finally gave in.

During World War I profiteering in the traditional sense reached a peak as military spending climbed to \$11 billion. Deceptive accounting practices, artificial price inflation and huge profits were the norm, but a new wrinkle was exposed by the Federal Trade Commission: the practice of paying extraordinary salaries and bonuses to corporate officers of war supply companies. For example, “the American Metal Co. in 1917 paid salaries and bonuses to four of its officers of over \$135,000 each....” Compared to the soldier’s pay of \$1.25 per day, these bloated bonuses alarmed the average citizen. “Take the profits out of war” became a

national slogan.

In 1934 the Senate, disturbed by war profiteering and allegations about American business practices in world re-armament, created the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry. It was chaired by Gerald P. Nye, Republican senator from North Dakota. The Nye investigation lasted three years and was the first study of the munitions industry, its relations with the military and the international sale of arms. It discovered profiteering was more extensive than previously thought and that the most serious abuses were in connection with Navy contracts. The committee found not only excessive profits, but an absence of real competition and suggested collusion among shipbuilders.

The Navy was also reprimanded for issuing contracts for ships that never were built. Perhaps the most startling revelation was that shipbuilders, aircraft companies, chemical and arms suppliers were peddling arms to China, Japan and Germany, a violation of the Versailles Treaty of 1918.

In 1941, Harry Truman, then a senator from Missouri, set up a Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. Truman’s prime motivation was to help win World War II then in progress; therefore, he was concerned with efficient mobilization and increasing production, not profiteering. With the end of World War II, the concern about war profiteering became a thing of the past. Enormous profits had been made, but the conflict was over and that’s all that mattered.

To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.

—George Washington: Speech to Congress, January 8, 1790

EXCERPT From *The Greatest Generation*

By Tom Brokaw

“**T**hey answered the call to help save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs.

“They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventures, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they were fighting, often hand to hand, in the most primitive conditions possible, across the bloodied landscape of France, Belgium, Italy, Austria. They fought their way up a necklace of South Pacific islands few had ever heard of before and made them a fixed part of American history— islands with names like Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, Okinawa. They were in the air every day, in skies filled with terror, and they went to sea on hostile waters far removed from the shores of their homeland.”

This generation of Americans
has a rendezvous with destiny.

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Activities

Like all plays, not everyone was a fan of *All My Sons* when it was initially produced. There were even cries from some sectors saying that it was technically inaccurate and, therefore, un-patriotic “Communist propaganda.”

Miller writes in his autobiography, *Timebends*, that he “was spared having to reply to such accusations when a Senate committee exposed the Wright Aeronautical Corporation of Ohio, which had exchanged the ‘Condemned’ tags on defective engines for ‘Passed’ and in cahoots with bribed army inspectors had shipped many of these failed machines to the armed forces.” Journalist Brooks Atkinson pointed out Miller’s attackers were “working in the direction of censorship and restriction.” Less than 10 years later Miller found himself under investigation by The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC).

- Did Miller need to “justify” his play?
- How much do you value the right to free speech?
- Does it concern you that HUAC existed?
- Do further research on the committee to determine if you think it was a committee that was fueled by relevant facts or misplaced fear.
- Can you draw any parallels to our political climate today?
- Should we be concerned with protection the freedom of speech for artists and ourselves?

Until WWII, our nation’s defense budget remained relatively steady. With the prospect of a war fought on two major fronts – both in Europe and in the Pacific – the need for an incredible amount of machinery, equipment, and supplies pushed defense spending to a record

high and, as Miller put it, “profiteering on a vast scale” ensued. President Franklin Roosevelt declared that he “did not want to see a single war millionaire created in the United States as a result of this world disaster” and Senator Truman along with Congress responded with an investigatory committee called the Truman Committee.

Recently our country has engaged in two wars in the Middle East and now fights in an ongoing “War on Terror.” Our defense spending is back at an all time high and government contracts in the billions are being awarded for both military equipment and foreign reconstruction, yet we have no committee such as the Truman Committee overseeing these contracts.

- **Create a “Truman Committee” in your classroom to investigate profiteering today. Research war profiteering and present findings on companies that may qualify as war profiteers.**
- **Have students consider Roosevelt’s statement about war millionaires. Examine the differences between legitimate war/defense corporate responsibility and profiteering. Contrast and Compare.**

Communities are not built of friends, or of groups of people with similar styles and tastes, or even of people who like and understand each other. They are built of people who feel they are part of something that is bigger than themselves: a shared goal or enterprise, like righting a wrong, or building a road, or raising children, or living honorably, or worshipping a god. To build community requires only the ability to see value in others; to look at them and see a poten-

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tial partner in one's enterprise.

Historian Helen Fein offers the phrase “universe of obligation” to help people understand an operational definition of community. She believes that communities often expand and contract to include or exclude members, and that this expansion or contraction involves not only circumstances, but real choices, moral and ethical choices, about how to see “other” people.

Fein's phrase, “universe of obligation,” describes “that circle of individuals or groups toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends.”

- Spend a few minutes jotting down what is powerful or significant about Helen Fein's definitions of *community* and *Universe of Obligations*. What “communities” do you belong to?
- How do these definitions relate to the communities with which you identify?

With a partner discuss:

- Which characters in *All My Sons* have a strong sense of their Universe of Obligation? Which do not?
- Do governments have a Universe of Obligation? To whom?
- Why might one country intervene in a conflict between or among countries or citizens of another country? When might they not?
- Why would an individual choose to participate in a protest movement? How does this demonstrate Universe of Obligation?
- How important is it that businesses and companies remain committed to the people within the communities they service?

- How important is it our Universe of

Obligation when considering our environment?

Additional Discussion Questions:

The relationship between father and son is one that Miller explores in many of his plays including *All My Sons*. Chris says to Joe “*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.*”

- How does the fact that Joe is his father affect his judgement?
- In the end, what does Chris expect of Joe? What does Joe expect of Chris? Do they get what they want?

While talking to Kate about Chris, Jim assures her “*He'll come back, Kate. These private little revolutions always die. The compromise is always made. In a peculiar way, Frank is right – every man does have a star. The star of one's honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once it's out it never lights again. I don't think he went very far. He probably just wanted to be alone to watch his star to go out.*”

- Do you think we all have a “star of honesty” as Jim proposes?
- Is it possible to live with a life in which you do not have to compromise one's honesty?
- Why do you think Jim feels it is impossible?
- Each major character has a journey. How did your idea of each character change as the play progressed? How do you feel about them in the end?

—Joe —Chris
—Kate —Ann

- In Act II Kate says of Chris “*There's some-*

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thing bigger than the family to him.” What does she mean by this?

- Base on Kate’s actions where do you think her loyalties lie?

- At the very end of the play Kate says to Chris “*Don’t, dear. Don’t take it on yourself. Forget now. Live.*”

- What do you think Kate is telling Chris to forget?

- What does she mean when she tells him to “live?”

- Ann reveals the truth of Larry’s death at a very critical point in the play. Why do you think she waits to show them the letter?

- Imagine the next scene of the play. What do

you think happens to each of the characters?

- What does the title, *All My Sons*, refer to?

Colorado Model Content Standard #1, #4, #5, #6 for Reading and Writing; students read and understand a variety of materials; students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing; students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technological sources; students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

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