All My Sons

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ARTHUR MILLER

Born to a prosperous middle-class Polish-Jewish family, Arthur Miller watched his mother and father lose most of their savings in the American financial panic of 1929. Miller went on to work his way through high school, supporting himself by means of part-time employment, and to enroll at the University of Michigan, from which he graduated in 1938 with a degree in English. Miller began writing plays as an undergraduate. By 1946, his *All My Sons* was a success (his first major work), and was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Author. In the 1940s and early 1950s Miller wrote other seminal works of American drama, most notably *Death of a Salesman*, the story of a small-time businessman named Willy Loman, and *The Crucible*, an allegory of McCarthy's communist hearings (then raging in the United States) set in 1600s Massachusetts, during the Salem Witch Trials. Miller's later career was dotted with smaller success and some notable failures, including the play *After the Fall* (1964), which dramatized his relationship to the deceased film actress Marilyn Monroe, and was believed by many to be an exercise in "bad taste," exposing as it did details of their married life. Miller lived well into his eighties, passing away in 2005, and on his death many in America and across the English-speaking world lauded his contributions to American drama.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of the Great Depression and of the Second World War on the work of Arthur Miller and his contemporaries. Even when Miller's plays don't specifically focus on the political woes of his age (the time immediately following World War II), they are infused with the political realities, the complexities of American power, which dominated popular discussion at the time. The Second World War elevated the US out of a crippling and decade-long financial depression; it put millions back to work; and it mobilized American production in the service of a clear and, for many, indomitable cause: the march of democracy against Fascism, as represented by the governments of Germany, Italy, and Japan. After the conclusion of the war, however, American GIs returned home, became educated, started families, and found themselves confronting a moral universe that was no longer so simple, so black-and-white, as that of the war in which they had been fighting. Miller concerned himself with the mind-set of the American family-man and –woman: those whose job was to provide, materially, for their families, but who often found that life was more difficult than the mere accumulation of wealth. *All My Sons*, like many of Miller's plays, is an attempt to sift through the values common to American families after the Second World War, in order to determine what "the good life" truly meant in an age of rising economic circumstances.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Arthur Miller wrote *All My Sons* during a flourishing period of American drama, with many playwrights breathing new life into the theatrical models of Greek tragedy and the dramatic realism of Anton Chekhov. Thornton Wilder's 1938 *Our Town*, which depicted the real-life joys and problems of citizens in the fictional town of Grover's Corners, was a major success when it premiered in the lead-up to the Second World War. Eugene O'Neill, active from the 1920s to the 1950s, and a Princeton drop-out who went on to be one of America's foremost playwrights and an eventual Nobel laureate, was famous for his reinterpretation of the Oresteia of Aeschylus, entitled *Mourning Becomes Electra*; he also wrote the well-known *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, the latter an account of addiction and family tension which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1958. Tennessee William's work in the period was also prominent, especially his *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the last of which was made into a feature film with Marlon Brando, and is considered a classic of 20th-century American realist drama. In Wilder, and to a greater extent in O'Neill and Williams, the tragedies, large and small, of contemporary American life in the first half of the 20th century became the stuff of theatrical drama—elevated to a plane of tragedy previously reserved for contemporary European writers, or for the heroes and gods of the Greek stage.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *All My Sons*
- **When Written:** 1946
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 1947
- **Literary Period:** Realism in American drama
- **Genre:** American realist drama
- **Setting:** Suburban United States (intentionally kept non-specific)
- **Climax:** Joe goes upstairs to shoot himself, while the rest of the family waits in the backyard below.
- **Antagonist:** George Deever

EXTRA CREDIT

Elia Kazan. *All My Sons* was first directed on the stage by Elia Kazan, a longtime friend of and collaborator with Arthur Miller. Kazan went on to "collaborate" with the House Un-American Activities committee, led by Senator Joe McCarthy, in order to identify those in Hollywood he felt to be tainted by Communist ideology—Kazan never fully regained his stature among some of his compatriots in the film and stage industries, but he and Miller eventually reconciled their views and worked together later in life.

Two film adaptations. The first film version of *All My Sons*, in 1948, was not strictly faithful to the play and received fair to positive reviews; the latter, in 1987, was a TV version which adhered more closely to the plot of the original play; the original film starred Edward G. Robinson and Burt Lancaster in the roles of Joe and Chris Keller, respectively.

PLOT SUMMARY

All My Sons, a play in three acts, is set in a small town several years after World War Two, and begins with Jim Bayliss, a doctor, and Joe Keller, head of the Keller family, sitting in Keller's backyard, reading the paper. A storm the previous night has shorn in half a **tree** that is revealed to memorialize Larry Keller, one of two Keller children—the son who did not survive the war. Chris, the other Keller son and a junior partner in the family manufacturing business, comes outside and tells his father, Joe, after Jim leaves, that the family cannot continue leading on Kate, Joe's wife, in the belief that Larry is still living. Frank Lubey, another neighbor of the Keller's (along with his wife Lydia Lubey), is using astrology to determine if Larry is alive, and he brings this information to Kate later in the play, but for the most part, Chris believes that all in the town have come to the same conclusion: that, after three years, Larry will not be returning to the small town, that Larry's plane crash in the war was fatal.

Chris also tells his father that Annie, Larry's former girlfriend who is visiting the Keller's from New York, is there because Chris intends to propose marriage to her. Joe has no real problem with the idea in itself, but Joe fears that Kate will not permit it, since Annie is "Larry's girl," and to give Annie to Chris would mean that Larry is really dead. Kate comes outside, as does Annie, and a series of strained conversations ensue, in which Chris attempts to demonstrate his affection for Annie, and Kate tries to emphasize that Larry is not dead and Annie is not "Chris's girl." Slowly, throughout the first act, it is revealed that Annie's father, Steve, was a former employee of Joe's at the manufacturing company during the war, and that Steve apparently OK'd the production of faulty plane parts, which were shipped to American planes, and which caused the death of 21 pilots in plane crashes. Steve went to jail for his negligence, but Joe was released, arguing in court that Steve acted alone, and that Joe did not force him to ship the defective parts.

Joe and Kate worry that Annie has come to stir up trouble in the Keller family regarding Joe's guilt in the manufacturing affair, and this, too, complicates the possibility of Chris and Annie's wedding. Chris also tells Annie that he has a hard time navigating the moral complexities of post-war life, and he relates a story from the war, in which a soldier gave him his last pair of **dry socks**, as an indication of the moral simplicity of battle.

George, Annie's brother, calls long-distance, from Columbus, where Steve is imprisoned, saying he, too, is going to visit the Keller home that evening. Annie worries that George is coming with revelations about the Joe-Steve manufacturing affair, and Kate tells Joe to prepare himself for George's questioning. George arrives, in a huff, and though Jim and Chris attempt to calm him, George accuses Joe of knowingly inducing Steve to "take the fall" for the manufacturing failures. George believes Steve's story, that Joe himself told Steve over the phone to shellac over the defective parts. George believes that Joe feigned sickness that evening to keep from going into the plant, thus retaining distance from the events, which enabled Joe to place the blame entirely on Steve. Joe denies these accusations to George, who leaves the house, but as Annie runs after him, Joe announces to Chris, and in front of Kate, that in fact George's story is true.

Chris is aghast, not just that this father produced the defective parts, but that Joe lied to put Steve in jail, and proceeded to make a fortune from the factory in the post-war boom. Chris feels complicit in his father's immorality, and goes for a drive that evening, while Joe and Kate weep on the house's back porch.

At the play's end, it is two in the morning the following day, and Chris returns from his drive to find Annie, Joe, and Kate outside. Annie, who wants Kate to believe that Larry is truly dead so that she and Chris can be married, shows to Kate a letter Larry wrote her the day before his death, in which he said his plane would "go missing" in an act of suicide, out of the shame Larry feels for Joe's and Steve's guilt. Joe, who for a long time had comforted himself with the idea that he was not responsible for his own son's death, realizes, when Chris reads the letter aloud, that he has not only killed 21 pilots—he has also killed, indirectly, his own son. Joe remarks that "all the soldiers . . . are his sons," and goes upstairs, feigning that he will turn himself in to the small town's jail. But a gunshot is heard; Joe has killed himself in the house, and though Chris tells his mother, outside, that he didn't intend for this to happen, Kate tells Chris and Annie, calmly, to go far away and start a new family elsewhere, since the guilt that has ravaged the Keller family can bring them nothing but harm. The play ends.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Joe Keller – Head of the Keller family, Joe runs a successful business, J. O. Keller, Inc., with his son, Chris. It is revealed, later in the play, that Joe OK'd the production of faulty plane parts during the Second World War, resulting in the deaths of 21 American airmen, although, at the time, Joe pawned this decision off on Steve Deever, Annie's father and Joe's subordinate at the company. After it is revealed by Annie that Larry knew of his father's malfeasance and killed himself in the war because of it, Joe goes upstairs, pretending he will finally go to jail for his crime, and shoots himself at the close of the play.

Kate Keller – Joe's devoted wife, Kate knows of Joe's malfeasance during the war and seeks to "sweep under the rug" her husband's moral failings. Kate also waits, day in, day out, for her son Larry's return, and curses her other son, Chris, for wanting to move on, and for desiring to marry Annie, whom Larry had dated before the war. At the play's end, however, after Joe's death, Kate tells Annie and Chris to move away from the small town and start a new family on their own.

Chris Keller – One of Joe and Kate's two sons, Chris survives the war and works in his father's business, making a good deal of money. Chris always had a nagging sense of doubt about his father's innocence in the manufacturing affair, and Chris resents that peacetime life does not follow the clear moral breakdown into good and evil of wartime (as Chris describes, using the anecdote of **dry socks** lent him by a soldier with none to spare). Chris ends the play telling his mother that he did not intend to guilt his father into killing himself—Kate recognizes this, and, absolving Chris of guilt for his father's death, tells Chris to move away with Annie.

Ann Deever – Known to those in the play as Annie, Ann is Chris's fiancée, formerly a girlfriend of Larry's before the war. Annie has not spoken to her father since Steve's conviction for his involvement in the manufacturing fiasco. Joe suspects Annie has come back not just to marry Chris but to "spy" on the Kellers in order to further Steve's cause for innocence. But Annie is a goodhearted individual, wanting only the best for those involved in the play—she wishes to marry Chris, she wants Kate to be happy, she wants her father to recognize his moral cowardice in following Joe's orders, and she wants Joe to take responsibility for his actions, which caused, indirectly, Larry's suicide during the war.

George Deever – Annie's brother, George has also given up all ties to Steve following Steve's trial, but when George hears that Annie wishes to marry Chris, George goes from New York to Columbus to seek out Steve and hear from him, once and for all, whether Joe was also guilty of the production of the faulty parts. George comes to the small town to attempt to prevent Annie from marrying Chris, and George's arrival heralds the revelation that Joe ordered Steve to caulk over the parts, a revelation that ultimately causes Joe to kill himself.

Dr. Jim Bayliss – One of the Kellers' neighbors, Jim and his wife Sue live in the house where Annie grew up. Jim laments the fact that he is forced to earn more money for Sue by performing a job he hates—he would rather serve as a medical researcher than as a practicing physician, but feels constrained by the demands of post-war materialist society to make more money and to appease his wife.

Sue Bayliss – Jim's wife, Sue, understands, and reveals to Annie, that much of the neighborhood realizes Joe was truly guilty of the manufacturing fiasco; Joe was simply shrewd enough to avoid jail-time. Sue advises Annie and Chris to move far away from the small town, in part because Chris's successes in business anger Jim, and in part because the town has been tainted by the scandal involving Joe and Steve.

Frank Lubey – The Kellers' neighbor on the other side, Frank was too old to be drafted, and this has caused him to place a great deal of emphasis on numerology and astrology. Frank has been constructing an astrological chart for Larry, to determine where and if he died; it is also shown that Frank and Annie had a thwarted courtship before the war.

Bert – A small boy from the neighborhood, Bert plays a longstanding game with Joe, attempting to "lock up" criminals in a jail Joe pretends is in the Keller family's basement. But Kate comes out to yell at Bert, telling him that there is no prison in the house, and that Joe has "nothing to hide" there. This instance of foreshadowing indicates that, in fact, Joe *does* have something to hide—his involvement in the manufacturing fiasco that killed 21 pilots.

Larry Keller – Never seen in the play, Larry Keller committed suicide in war, following news that his father and Steve manufactured faulty parts and killed American soldiers. Only Annie (Larry's former girlfriend) knew of Larry's suicide, and when she reveals it Joe comes to believe that he has killed his son, and therefore kills himself at the close of the play. Larry is memorialized by the Kellers in the form of a **tree** in the backyard, which is shorn by the wind.

Steve Deever – Never seen in the play, Steve Deever, Annie's father, was Joe's subordinate at the manufacturing plant, and his cowardice in allowing the parts to be caulked over and shipped has landed him in jail. Steve, however, knows that Joe ordered him to caulk over the parts, and Steve therefore demands that Joe, too, face justice for the crime he has committed.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lydia Lubey – Frank's doting wife, with whom he has three children. Lydia is shown, herself, to have had a thwarted courtship with George before the war. But George was drafted

and Frank was not; thus Lydia ended up with Frank, much to George's chagrin.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

FAMILY AND FAMILIAL OBLIGATION

Nearly all the characters in the play are concerned with the establishment and maintenance of family life. Joe Keller is the "head" of the Kellers: he has run a successful manufacturing business both during and after the Second World War. Joe cares primarily about the happiness of his wife Kate and his son Chris, who works with him in the family business. Larry, another son, was lost in a plane crash during the war and has yet to be found. Joe seems to recognize that Larry will not return, as does Chris, but Kate holds out hope that Larry is still alive. To Kate, Larry's being missing means that the family must be on permanent "high alert," in case he should return. She hopes for his safe return at every moment, so that the family can be whole again. Chris, for his part, wishes to soothe all parts of the family: he works hard for his father, and wants his mother to give up the idea that Larry is coming home. Chris also wants to start his own family with Annie, former girlfriend of Larry, with whom he has fallen in love, and whom he has asked to marry him. Annie wants to marry Chris but seems worried about her own family—her father, Steve, was a subordinate of Joe Keller's in the business, but an accident at the plant during the war (resulting in the manufacture of faulty plane parts that downed 21 airmen) caused Joe to blame Steve, saying Steve OK'd the production of the defective parts. Steve is rounding out a prison term for allowing the defective parts to be sent out, and Annie worries about her father's wellbeing and that of her brother, George, a lawyer who later returns to the Keller home to find Annie and prevent her from marrying Chris.

Other characters in the play manage their own "family units." Dr. Jim Bayliss is unhappy with his wife Sue, and though he tried briefly to leave her in the past, he has returned and largely given up his dream of becoming a medical researcher, so that he can make enough money for Sue. Frank Lubey married Lydia, a childhood sweetheart of George's (as is hinted at toward the end of the play); Frank and Lydia have three children together, and George believes that his bad luck (causing him to be drafted and Frank to avoid the draft) resulted in Frank's winning of Lydia and success in life.

The playwright Arthur Miller presents a paradox of family obligation: the more one attempts to care for one's family, in the play, the more one makes decisions that end up harming one's family. Thus Joe attempted to cover up his mistake at the plant, and blamed it on Steve, in order to protect the Keller family and ensure their financial success. But Joe's fatal decision leads Steve to land in prison, ruining Annie and George's family; its later, unintended consequences jeopardize the married happiness of Chris and Annie, and cause Joe to commit suicide. This is the final unwinding of the Keller family, as Kate tells Chris, in the final scene, to go off with Annie and begin a new life far away—a fresh start untainted by the tragedy of the Kellers.

LOSS AND MEMORY

Many characters in the play wrestle with the memory of loved ones who are now gone: lost to them or dead. The most prominent "lost" character is Larry, one of Joe and Kate's two sons. Joe believes, ironically, that Larry was more willing to "let slide" some of the small things that help a business to turn a profit. In fact, Larry committed suicide *because* of his father's criminal negligence at the factory. Kate, for her part, worries that no one in the family wishes to remember Larry. She believes that remembering Larry's life is inseparable from the belief that Larry will return one day, alive. And Kate infuses the **tree**, planted for Larry, with a kind of supernatural significance, believing that the tree's destruction foretells the destruction of Larry's memory itself.

Joe, Chris, and Annie believe that Larry is dead and have come to terms with his death; they wish to move on. But Kate fears that Chris and Annie want to do so only for "vulgar" reasons, because the two of them wish to be married and have a family themselves. Joe is happy that Chris and Annie have found each other, however, and does not believe that their wedding would in any way "destroy" the memory of Larry. Joe, too, wants to "forget" Larry's death, because there are many parts of the war he wishes to forget, most notably the manufacturing fiasco at the factory. Annie does not harbor a grudge against Joe, in the beginning, because she believes her father really was responsible for the mistake; she has come to terms with the "loss" of her father in prison, and she has not visited him there. George, however, has not come to terms with this "loss," and when he hears from Steve that Joe was actually responsible for the parts' production, then lied about it, George wishes to make sure that no one in the Keller family has forgotten the memory of Steve and the ruin his life has become. George feels he has lost his chance with Lydia, because he (George) was forced to fight in the war, whereas Frank escaped the draft. George is reminded of his loss of Lydia when he returns to the Keller home. And Jim rues what he has lost, the compromises he has made, in marrying Sue and agreeing to settle down.

Throughout the play, then, there is a feeling that characters wish to "put the war behind them," to forget the deaths of those

they've loved, and the horrible things the war has caused them to endure. By the play's end, however, this desire to "move on" has unraveled. Chris has lost respect for his father, then his father himself—and Kate loses a husband. And all lose the belief that Larry might still be alive, since his letter to Annie is revealed, showing that he intentionally crashed his plane out of disgust for his father and Steve's actions at the plant.

WAR, MORALITY, AND CONSEQUENCES

The Second World War is not just the immediate worldwide precursor to the play; it is inseparable from its action. Specifically, the war resulted in the death of Larry and caused the kind of difficult choices that forced Joe and Steve into their fateful decision to allow the production of cracked parts for American planes. But the war also provided Larry, Chris, and other American soldiers a clear set of black-and-white moral choices: democracy versus fascism, good versus evil. Larry is lost in the war (later shown to have committed suicide), and Chris survives. Although Larry's death is mourned dearly by everyone, including by Chris, Chris himself must live in the shadow of his brother's death—he must carry on with "survivor's guilt," and wonder why he was the one who was spared. As Chris explains to Annie at the end of Act I, he loved the sense of camaraderie in wartime, the feeling that one man could and must help another, as evidenced by last pair of **dry socks** another GI was willing to lend him. And Chris mourns the fact that, in peacetime America, this sense of camaraderie has vanished, has been replaced by an overwhelming desire for material gain.

Joe admits that wartime productions was so stressful, and he wanted his business to succeed so much, that there was nothing he could do but allow the defective parts to roll off the assembly line unimpeded. For him, this was a decision made to protect and support his family, but which also obscured the greater cruelty of battle: that these parts would be placed in American planes and would kill Americans, the very cause Steve and Joe wanted to support. War has taken Larry away from Annie, and, on a subtler level, it has made any prospect of Annie's future happiness nearly impossible, because others in her life, including Kate Keller, will always wonder whether Annie "waited long enough" for Larry, or whether she "hopped into bed" with another man and married him at the first chance. Annie finally reveals the letter Larry sent her—admitting to his impending suicide in battle—in the hopes that this terrible letter will at least show Kate that Annie has not moved on out of callousness.

But the letter, another consequence of war, causes Joe to realize that he has not only killed members of other people's families—other Americans' families—but indirectly a member of his own. Joe goes upstairs and shoots himself; he is another casualty of the war. Thus the war was not "over" when the peace treaties were signed. Instead, Chris, Joe, Steve, and others in the play carried the war inside them, transposing into a morally-fraught environment the same life-and-death struggles they had once approached with a definite sense of moral purpose. Now, with that moral purpose gone, the horrors of war and death nevertheless remain.

WEALTH AND ITS ACCUMULATION

The play dramatizes a common element of post-Second World War American society: the belief that the acquisition of wealth and material possessions was part of American power, following the defeat of fascism in Europe and Asia. Joe believes that he must acquire wealth in order to please his family and make something of himself in the world. He has very little by way of formal education, and therefore considers himself "self-made." His shrewdness in business is well known in the community. Joe's manufacturing business has adapted well, both during and after the war. In wartime, Joe understood that acknowledging any malfunction in parts would cause the government to remove its contract, thus dooming the business. And after the war, Joe does all he can to transition the factory from wartime to peacetime production. Joe therefore uses his wealth as proof of a kind of moral fortitude: the money he has is the money he earned. He wants his son Chris to feel this way, too, but Chris is more conflicted about the source of his money, perhaps because he senses that his father might not have been entirely truthful in his "exoneration" following Steve's conviction. Larry is mourned by the family not just because he was lost during the war, but because he has lost a chance to benefit from the post-war boom.

Other characters—namely Kate and Sue—warn Annie and Chris that they must make a life for themselves and earn a great deal of money. There is a sense that money can solve all, or nearly all, of one's problems, that it is the only thing necessary for the establishment of a prosperous future and a happy family. Sue understands that her husband Jim feels his current life is a prison, and that she forces Jim to make money doing a job he hates, rather than allowing him to make less money and feel morally and spiritually fulfilled as a medical researcher. Sue believes, fundamentally, that the accumulation of wealth is more important than Jim's feeling of personal fulfillment.

Of course, as the play shows, the pursuit of wealth is insufficient in papering over the moral complexities of the war and its aftermath. Money does not bring Larry back; it does not free Steve. In fact, the pursuit of money is what caused Steve's imprisonment, Larry's suicide, and, later, Joe's guilt-induced suicide. If money is the root of happiness in a materialist American culture, it is also the root of the sadness that culture attempts largely to hide.

LIABILITY, CULPABILITY, AND GUILT

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the play attempts to parse who is guilty for Larry's death, Steve's incarceration, and the deaths of the 21 airmen whose planes fell out of the sky. The tracing of these lines of guilt runs throughout the drama.

At first, it appears to everyone, except Annie, that Larry's death was an accident, or that he was shot down in battle. But Annie finally reveals that Larry chose to commit suicide because he had learned of his father's, and Steve's, professional malfeasance. Larry does not wait to hear what the trial's verdict will be; he "convicts" his father and Steve in his own mind, and chooses to end his life rather than confront the reality of this guilt back home after the war. Chris, on the other hand, has taken a job from his father after the war, and he stands to inherit the manufacturing company when his father retires. In this sense, Chris, who perhaps always sensed, vaguely, that his father had OK'd the production of the parts, nevertheless sweeps this feeling of guilt "under the rug," as he continues to earn a good living with his father. Only at the play's end does Chris confront, fully, the source of his family income, and the fact that it is tainted by the deaths of American soldiers.

Joe's decision to allow the parts to be put in the planes was a small one—he knew there was a chance they could cause the planes to crash, though he wasn't sure—and he allayed his feelings of guilt by saying, at least, that his own son didn't fly P-40s, thus he did not kill his own son. Kate believes, and says repeatedly, that a father killing his son is inherently and especially immoral. In killing himself, Joe seems to accept responsibility for several crimes: for lying and forcing Steve to go to jail in his stead; for causing the deaths, through negligence, of 21 pilots; and for indirectly causing Larry's death, though he believed Larry did not fly P-40s.

Because Joe's money is therefore tainted by the multidimensional nature of his guilt, the only advice Kate can offer at the end of the play is simple: Chris and Annie must move away, must start a new life elsewhere. Kate has come to this moment of moral clarity in realizing that Joe's decision to kill himself, though gruesome, has allowed him to take responsibility, finally, for his actions. Thus the play leaves Chris and Annie as the only hope for a new generation that can move beyond the guilt of their ancestors, and can, with a fresh start, establish a new family far away from the small town.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

LARRY'S TREE

Larry's disappearance in the war is one of the Keller family's great traumas. After the war and Chris's return to work for Joe, the family planted a tree to memorialize Larry, in the backyard, although Kate never gave up hope that Larry might return alive. In the beginning of the play, the tree is found shorn in half by the wind, in August, the same month Larry was born. Kate views this as a sign that the Kellers have forgotten Larry and abandoned the thought of his return. In this way, the tree serves a complex symbolic purpose: it is planted to symbolize Larry's life, but in fact it underscores, to Kate, the idea that many believe Larry to be already dead and gone. When the tree is destroyed, Kate chooses to interpret this not as evidence of Larry's actual death, but of the "falsity" of any memorial tribute to Larry, since one can't memorialize a person who is still alive. Only at the play's end, when Annie reveals Larry's suicide letter to the Kellers, does Kate understand that Larry is never coming home, and that, tree or no tree, she must come to terms with Larry's death, and Joe's guilt in the manufacturing fiasco, without the supernatural aid of symbols like the tree.

DRY SOCKS

In a conversation with Annie at the close of Act 1, Chris recounts a brief story of a GI in the war who offered Chris his last pair of dry socks. Chris views this gesture, and these socks, as indicative of the kind of care and brotherhood soldiers showed to one another in battle, and Chris rues the idea that this brotherhood is now lost in post-war, materialist culture. Chris's dry socks, like the tree, are also a complex symbol. To Chris, the dry socks are an uncomplicated way of representing camaraderie in battle. But it is clear, in the context of the play, that Chris wishes all moral decisions in peacetime resembled the moral clarity the socks represent. Working in the family business, and coping with his father's guilt in the manufacturing fiasco, are not so simple as this act of kindness and charity, and Chris bemoans the fact that, in his adult life, he must confront a moral universe far more complicated, far less black-and-white, than the one in which he took solace during combat.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *All My Sons* published in 2000.

Act 1 Quotes

Well, a favorable day for a person is a fortunate day, according to his stars. In other words it would be practically impossible for him to have died on his favorable day.

Related Characters: Frank Lubey (speaker), Larry Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Frank is an openly superstitious character. He has spent his time since the war living in suburbia, working a job, and reading astrological charts for information on Larry Keller's disappearance. From the beginning, then, Miller's play is concerned with the line between rational understanding, belief, and superstition. Most of the other characters are not as explicitly superstitious as Frank, but they nevertheless each have, in their way, their own non-rational understandings of how events played out during and after the Second World War.

Despite this, the other characters, with the exception of Kate Keller, seem not to pay too much serious attention to the idea that Larry is still alive. But the very slim possibility—that he has been waiting out the war, that he was captured—appears to keep the family together. This frustrated potential for Larry's return is symbolized by the tree in the front yard—a tree the Kellers planted to memorialize Larry, but which Kate now feels might have been put in the ground prematurely.

It's so strange—Annie's here and not even married. And I've got three babies. I always thought it'd be the other way around.

Related Characters: Lydia Lubey (speaker), Ann Deever

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Lydia, Frank's husband, has also participated in the post-war return to "normalcy." She has children, she and Frank live together. They have assembled a suburban life that looks away from and beyond the horrors of the war. Lydia then seems surprised when she realizes that not everyone has achieved this dream in his or her own life. In particular, she is struck that Ann, who appeared destined to marry Larry, has not begun her own life without him.

Lydia and Frank do not play central roles in the work, but they are nevertheless reminders both of the aspiration to be "normal" and of the difficulties in maintaining this state of equilibrium. Lydia, Frank, and their three children appear to be an intact family—but they, like all the other characters, are still wracked by the thought of the war and its violence. Similarly, the other couple mentioned in this part of the play—Sue and Jim Bayliss—also have a relationship that is more complex than it initially appears. Sue's jealousy—her belief that any phone call for her husband is a woman trying to begin an affair with him—characterizes their relationship despite all appearances of peace and calm between them.

She was out here when it broke.
When?
About four this morning. I heart it cracking and I woke up and looked out. She was standing right here when it cracked.

Related Characters: Chris Keller, Joe Keller (speaker), Kate Keller

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Kate has trouble sleeping, and when she this is the case, she tends to go out into the front yard to observe Larry's tree. The tree is a complex symbol for Kate. On the one hand, it represents Larry, her beloved son who was lost at war. It is a memorial to him. On the other hand, Kate wants to believe that Larry needs no memorial at all—that he is still alive, waiting to be found somewhere in the Pacific.

Thus it is unclear what it means, for Kate and the other characters, when the tree is hit by lightning. Does this mean that Larry himself is dead, destroyed? Or does it mean that the idea of a memorial for Larry is no longer necessary—that Larry is still alive? Larry is in fact dead, but Kate still holds out hope for his return. Later in the play, Kate will learn more information about what has happened to her son—but at that point, Kate is not sure she *wants* to know that information.

The trouble is, you don't see enough women. You never did.
So what? I'm not fast with women.
I don't see why it has to be Annie.
Because it is.

Related Characters: Joe Keller, Chris Keller (speaker), Ann Deever

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Both Joe and Kate have trouble with the idea, later revealed in the play, that Chris will marry Ann. This is because Chris's relationship with Ann upsets the agreed-upon order of the families before the war, when Ann and Larry were together. Kate even praised Ann later for "waiting" for Larry for many years after he has gone missing.

But eventually Ann must move on with her life, and she does fall genuinely in love with Chris. Joe and Kate, for their part, however, have trouble accepting the idea that Chris and Ann could be together. Like the tree, this relationship would imply that Larry is really gone—that life has gone on without him after the war. Joe has great difficulty coming to terms with this. Indeed, many in the town have difficulty with the idea of Chris and Ann together, too. Miller has created a setting in which families, though independent, do seem to depend on one another's conception of what is normal and right. Thus Sue and Jim, and Frank and Lydia, speak in passing of Larry and Ann's relationship of years ago—as though any other relationship of Ann's could not be valid.

But I'll always love that girl. She's one that didn't jump into bed with somebody else as soon as it happened with her fella.

Related Characters: Kate Keller (speaker), Ann Deever

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Kate praises Ann in a manner that is actually chastising her. Kate pretends not to know why Ann would want to visit the Keller family now, since Larry is still missing. Both Kate and Joe seem to acknowledge that there is a friendship between Chris and Ann, but neither is willing to accept the possibility that Chris and Ann might wish to be married. This suspension of belief is similar to the suppression of other difficult truths in the play—namely, that Larry is still alive, or that Joe might have been responsible for the faulty parts just as much as, or more than, Steve was.

Thus Kate's praise is actually a veiled criticism. Kate wants to make sure that Ann knows she is not really permitted to move beyond Larry. For, if Ann does so, this would imply that other members of the family would have to, too. And Kate and Joe are not ready to do this—not ready to accept the reality that Larry really did perish during the Second World War.

See? We should have never planted that tree. I said so in the first place; it was too soon to plan a tree for him.
Too soon!
We rushed into it . . . .

Related Characters: Kate Keller, Chris Keller (speaker), Larry Keller

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20-1

Explanation and Analysis

This is an even more explicit reference, on Kate's part, to the idea that Larry might still in fact be alive. Chris understands that this really cannot be the case. Furthermore, Chris knows that Kate and Joe's unwillingness to accept Larry's death is a way for the family both to deal with the trauma of the war and to refuse to move beyond it.

Chris, however, does want to leave the war behind. He does not want to remain in Larry's shadow, and he does not want to be compared to his brother anymore. Larry is no longer alive, and so he can no longer marry Ann, or raise a family with her, or return to the town and take over the family business. For Chris, life really begins with the acknowledgement that Larry truly is gone.

As in the quotation above, the tree is a complex, "overdetermined" symbol. On the one hand, it is a celebration of Larry's life. On the other, it marks the fact that he is truly gone, and thus requires a memorial. Thus as much as Kate is drawn to the tree, walking to it in the night, she also knows that the tree itself "replaces" Larry—just as Chris has "replaced" Larry as Ann's lover.

> I've only met you, Ann, but if I may offer you a piece of advice—When you marry, never—even in your mind—never count your husband's money.

Related Characters: Dr. Jim Bayliss (speaker), Ann Deever

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Jim Bayliss is a minor character in the play, and his statement here, to Ann, can be interpreted in several ways. It could be an argument that Ann should be careful to marry for love—to establish a bond and a family with someone whom she trusts completely. Or, Jim could be making a more useful and cynical point, that Ann might be marrying for all sorts of reasons, but that money, as a baseline for marriage, is not particularly dependable. Financial fortunes rise and fall, and Jim notes that Ann should be prepared to accept that her husband might not wind up wealthy after all. This in itself would be a comment on Jim's own marriage, as he ends up stuck in a job he hates trying to financially support his wife.

Jim's piece of advice also indicates the nature of neighborly interaction in the town. Neighbors have no trouble offering hints or tips on one another's business. It is a close-knit and gossipy community, bound together by the traumas of the war.

> It's wrong to pity a man like that [Steve]. Father or no father, there's only one way to look at him. He knowingly shipped out parts that would crash an airplane. And how do you know Larry wasn't one of them?

Related Characters: Ann Deever (speaker), Steve Deever, Larry Keller

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Ann states without guilt that if her father, Steve, knowingly was involved in the shipping of faulty parts for airplanes during the war, then he should be punished. Ann believes that the guilt for the airmen's deaths should fall on the heads of those who were negligent in manufacturing the parts. She does not seem to imply that Joe was one of these people—she places the blame squarely on her father's shoulders, despite their close familial relationship.

But, of course, the other characters in the play recognize that Joe might very well have been responsible for the shipping of the parts as well, and that Joe might even have "sold out" Steve in order to protect his (Joe's) family, at Steve's expense. Ann appears not to believe this. But others in the community wonder if Ann hasn't returned to "check up on" the Keller family, to see whether Joe has been unfair to her father, who is currently in prison for his crime.

> The man was a fool, but don't make a murderer out of him.

Related Characters: Joe Keller (speaker), Steve Deever

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Joe's motivations for justifying Steve's behavior (knowingly shipping faulty parts for airplanes during the war) are complex. We learn later that Joe really is guilty of negligence, and that he is doubly guilty for foisting the blame entirely on Steve. By the end of the play, it sounds as though Steve simply was not strong enough to stand up to Joe and prevent the shipment of the parts. Nevertheless, the prime mover in the shipment was Joe, and therefore he should have paid most mightily for his crimes. Yet Joe walks around the community unpunished—until the very end of the play.

Here Joe is inclined to say that Steve was only being foolish—that Steve was certainly to blame, but that Steve is no criminal. In this way Joe sounds like he's being generous about his former partner, when in reality he's defending his own actions to himself. It is a rich piece of acting on Joe's part, and a part he has been playing openly in the community since the close of the war and the trial that ensued.

> . . . one time it'd been raining several days and this kid came to me, and gave me his last pair of dry socks. Put them in my pocket. That's only a little thing—but . . . that's the kind of guys I had. They didn't die; they killed themselves for each other . . . .

Related Characters: Chris Keller (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Chris's memory of a boy giving him a pair of dry socks is perhaps his lasting image of the war. For Chris, it contains both the brutality of battle—the fact that dry socks were at a premium in war-time—and the possibility of human generosity even during terrible circumstances. Chris seems to believe that the brotherhood of men at war was a real feeling, something he can hold onto even in the tragic aftermath of that conflict. That is why the image has remained so intensely in his mind—it is an indicator of the good that can come of a difficult, trying, and even traumatic circumstance.

Chris brings up this memory because he is trying, in his way, to wrestle with the demons of his past—his guilt, for example, over surviving the war while his brother Larry was killed. Chris knows that war can tear people apart, so he tries, in conjuring this image, to remind himself that war can also forge friendship and trust.

Act 2 Quotes

❝ . . . it's very unusual to me, marrying the brother of your sweetheart.
I don't know. I think it's mostly that whenever I need somebody to tell me the truth I've always thought of Chris . . . . He relaxes me.

Related Characters: Ann Deever, Sue Bayliss (speaker), Chris Keller, Ann Deever, Larry Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Sue makes no bones about telling Ann that her behavior—marrying Chris after being Larry's girlfriend during the war—is "strange" to her. Ann, for her part, admirably replies that she loves and admires Chris, and that the two themselves have had a long friendship, dating back even to when Larry and Ann were together. Ann thus parries Sue's attack—trying to brush off her concern while defending her choice to be with Chris.

Sue seems to want to sow discord between Chris and Ann. She, like Jim and some of the other neighbors, is heavily involved in the privates lives of those she lives near to. Miller creates an atmosphere in which private business, things that belong within a home or to one family, become instances of public drama. Joe, Kate, Chris, and Larry are public, tragic figures in their town, and their neighbors know nearly as much, or more, about their lives than they do.

❝ The man [Joe] is innocent, Ann. Remember he was falsely accused once and it put him through hell. How would you behave if you were faced with the same thing again? Annie believe me, there's nothing wrong for you here, believe me, kid.

Related Characters: Chris Keller (speaker), Joe Keller, Ann Deever

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the play, Chris still tries to defend his father. He genuinely believes that Joe has been falsely accused; Chris can not reckon with the possibility that his father really did allow faulty parts to be put in American planes. In this way, Chris's inability to cope with a difficult truth is not dissimilar to his mother's. Chris, for his part, believes that Kate is the most deluded in the family—the least willing to come to terms with the past. But Chris himself has "dark spots" of his memory, with which he'd rather not become reacquainted.

Chris explains this to Ann, even as he realizes that Ann's own father, who worked with Joe, has taken the brunt of the blame for the plane parts. Steve has suffered far worse than Joe has suffered. For while both have seen their reputations crumble, only Steve is actually in prison—and only because Joe allowed him to take sole responsibility for the negligence at the plant. Thus Chris, for all his good intentions, seems to be explaining to Ann a situation she understands better than he can possibly know.

❝ . . . you and George . . . go to prison and tell him [Steve] . . . "Dad, Joe wants to bring you into the business when you get out."
You'd have him as a partner?
No, no partner. A good job.

Related Characters: Joe Keller, Ann Deever (speaker),

George Deever, Ann Deever, Steve Deever

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Joe's comments to Chris and Ann are as complicated as many of his other emotional responses in the text. Joe and Steve were partners in the airplane-part business—thus, Joe offering Steve a job is, at best, a less-valuable offer than the job Steve originally had. Of course, it is later revealed that Joe also testified against Steve and put him in jail, allowing him to take the fall for the entire faulty-part affair. Many have repudiated Steve and his actions—including Ann—although George, Ann's brother, seems more willing to defend their father.

Joe, in short, feels that he owes at least something to Steve for the time Steve has served in prison. But Joe cannot come out in public and say that he, Joe, blamed Steve for the problem, or that this "generosity" on his part is really a feeble attempt to ease his own guilt in the affair. Thus, as in other parts of the play, the characters are damned both by their crimes and by their inability to expiate for them. Joe, at the end of the play, is horrified when his guilt is revealed, and he kills himself as a result. But he is also obviously relieved at having made plain the internal burden he has borne for so long.

> How is he [Steve]?
> He got smaller
> Smaller?
> Yeah, little. He's a little man. That's what happens to suckers, you know. It's good I went to him in time—another year there'd be nothing left but his smell.

Related Characters: Ann Deever, George Deever (speaker), Steve Deever

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

George is clearly the most embittered character in the play. He is desperately angry at the Keller family for what he feels is their injustice toward his father. George seems to understand that his father, Steve, could not have acted alone in the faulty-part affair. He senses instead that Joe perhaps directed the production of the parts, or at least knew about them, and did nothing to stop their shipment.

George therefore does not participate in much of the "performance" of goodwill and friendship that others in the town, and especially in the Keller family, try to put on. George is not interested in coming back to the town he once knew. He is a lawyer now; he has moved away, and has distanced himself from his father and family, although he remains somewhat close to Ann. But George knows that the way to deal with the traumas of the war is to make plain what exactly happened and to face it directly. This is why he has returned to town—to pursue his hunch about his father's behavior, and Joe's guilt, and get to the bottom of the matter.

> The court didn't know your father! But you know him. You know in your heart Joe did it.

Related Characters: George Deever (speaker), Joe Keller, Chris Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Here, George becomes even more explicit in his condemnation of Joe Keller, the man he has believed, all along, to be guilty. George references the idea that Chris could "know" that his father is guilty "in his [Chris's] heart," and that all Chris would have to do to understand the matter would be to think about it squarely, to approach it honestly. For George, trained in the law, the facts of the case are relatively straightforward, and Joe's alibi during the time of the crime does not make sense.

But George is also pointing to perhaps the most powerful desire in the town after the war—the desire to proceed as though nothing happened, to state that everything is still normal, just as it was before. Chris is willing to participate in this to a degree—at least insofar as wanting to marry Ann, to continue working for his father, and to begin his own life after the war. For her part, Ann is also torn between Chris's perspective and her brother's—she too seems to sense that something is wrong with the Keller family, although she is unwilling to blame Joe, at this point, for his alleged crime.

And now you're going to listen to me, George. You had big principles, Eagle Scouts the three of you [Larry, George, Chris] . . . Stop being a philosopher, and look after yourself. Like Joe was just saying—you move back here, he'll help you get set, and I'll find you a girl and put a smile on your face.

Related Characters: Kate Keller (speaker), Larry Keller, Chris Keller, George Deever, Joe Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Kate more explicitly addresses what she perceives to be George's "problem." Kate believes that everything can be solved by the creation of an intact family unit. This is perhaps why she is most haunted by Larry's loss—because Larry was not able to return, marry Ann, and begin his own family. Although Kate also wants Chris to have a family, she is cooler on the prospect of Chris's marrying Ann, who is "Larry's girl," and who belongs therefore to a different family unit.

Kate ignores, then, what George is really saying—that Joe is a criminal and a liar, and that he has been living his lie for some years. That is a fact Kate cannot approach—just as she cannot tell herself that Larry is really gone. It is much easier for Kate to believe, instead, that the problem is George's—that George has not recovered from the war, and that he just needs a wife and family to set him straight.

You, Joe . . . you're amazingly the same.
Say, I ain't got time to get sick.
He hasn't been laid up in fifteen years.
Except my flu during the war.

Related Characters: George Deever, Joe Keller, Kate Keller (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

This is a turning point in the play—a juncture wherein it becomes clear that Joe is, in fact, lying about what he did, or didn't do, during the production of the faulty airplane parts. Joe has previously claimed that he was not at the plant that day because he was sick with the flu. But his inveterate pride also causes him to proclaim, here, that he is never, ever sick—thus essentially contradicting his own alibi. Joe's bluster, his desire to be the alpha male in all situations, here gets him into trouble—and George, ever astute, seems to pick up on this.

Joe has had to manage his lie carefully ever since the war. A great deal of his life, indeed, has been consumed by the maintenance of the lie—the argument that Steve is solely responsible for the faulty parts, and that he, Joe, has maintained his integrity. Joe has even gone so far as to offer Steve a job (though not his co-ownership) after his prison sentence. But even Joe seems to realize, at this point in the play, that the lie is fraying—that his own guilt is becoming more and more clear.

Act 3 Quotes

What'd Joe do, tell him?
Tell him what?
Don't be afraid, Kate, I know. I've always known.
How?
It occurred to me a long time ago.

Related Characters: Dr. Jim Bayliss, Kate Keller (speaker), Joe Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

This is an immensely important moment in the play. Jim reveals that he has known all along that Joe must have been guilty—that Joe's alibi has never stood up to scrutiny. But Jim also states that this is okay—that sometimes, in the course of a person's life, a man has to lie in order to put himself in a better position to succeed. The world is composed of people who have done this, and Jim does not except himself from this company. He talks, later in this passage, of a time he briefly left his wife, and says that the two swept this behavior under the rug as if it never occurred.

Thus Chris learns here that it is not so important that the town has to actually *forget* all that has happened during the war. The problem is not total suppression of the truth—the problem is Chris's concern with finding that truth out. Jim states that one does not need the truth—what one needs, instead, is a willingness to plow on regardless, to maintain the status quo and avoid causing trouble.

> You have no strength. The minute there's trouble you have no strength.

Joe, you're doing the same thing again; all your life whenever there's trouble you yell at me and you think that settles it.

Related Characters: Joe Keller, Kate Keller (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Here Joe blames Kate for not having strength. This is ironic at best, and at worst cruel of Joe, who has asked Kate to keep many of the family's secrets for years, including his own guilt in the case of the faulty parts (a guilt that Kate has always understood). Joe's bursts of anger punctuate the play. They are as much a fact of life in the town as other, more pleasant interactions between families.

Kate stands up to Joe here, however. She implies, as she has not before, that she has stood by Joe during the terrible trials their family has endured. And she has placed her faith in Joe—she has not wavered in her support, even as their neighbors more or less acknowledge that Joe is probably culpable, at least in part, for the faulty plane components. Kate thus argues that Joe only knows how to oppose, how to get angry—he will do anything to defend his name. What Joe cannot do, however, is justify his behavior during the war, as it was Joe's negligence that caused the parts to be shipped.

> Joe, Joe . . . it don't excuse it that you did it for the family. It's got to excuse it!

There's something bigger than the family to him.

Related Characters: Kate Keller (speaker), Joe Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation Joe offers the central justification for his behavior during the war. He admits that it was wrong, or at least implies it—he knows that his actions resulted in the deaths of American servicemen. But he argues that there is an even greater obligation for the patriarch of a family—and that is the obligation to his wife and children. Joe believes that he did what he could to protect his company during war, and that this resulted in a better life for those who depend upon him.

This reasoning (essentially, that the ends justify the means) will prove to be wishful thinking as the play goes on, however. For Ann and Chris realize that Larry really did die because of the faulty parts—he decided to kill himself in his shame and guilt over his father's sins. That is, Larry was essentially killed by Joe's negligence, his willingness to cut corners. But even if this weren't the case—even if Joe had only killed other people's children—his behavior still would have been wrong. Joe finally believes this and acknowledges it when he says that all the servicemen were "his sons," toward the end of Act 3.

> My dear, if the boy was dead, it wouldn't depend on my words to make Chris know it . . . .The night he gets into your bed, his heart will dry up. Because he knows and you know. To his dying day he'll wait for his brother!

Related Characters: Kate Keller (speaker), Ann Deever, Chris Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Kate's bitterness over the loss of Larry knows no bounds. She is even willing to compromise Chris's happiness in order to "prove" that Ann ought to wait for Larry, and that Chris is merely moving in on "his brother's girl." Kate appears to need this illusion—that of Larry's safe return—in order to keep living. But she does not seem to realize, or does not care, that her insistence on Larry's lingering presence is ruining the happiness of those around her, even her own son.

Kate's argument here, too, echoes what she and Joe feel all the time: a deep-down, half-conscious guilt. Each character in the Keller family—those who have survived—nurses a different form of guilt. Joe knows that he has negligently killed Americans. Kate knows that Joe is guilty, and that she has helped him to cover up his guilt. And Chris feels, rightly or wrongly, that perhaps he is achieving happiness at Larry's expense—a happiness Larry did not survive to feel.

What are you talking about? What else can you do?
I could jail him! I could jail him, if I were human any more. But I'm like everybody else now. I'm practical now. You made me practical.
But you have to be.

Related Characters: Kate Keller, Chris Keller (speaker), Joe Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

"Practicality" is an important concept for all those in the Keller family, as well as for George and Ann. Joe believes it was "practical" to cover up his guilt and let Steve take the fall for the parts. After all, Joe thought, Steve was guilty of not standing up to Joe—and someone had to keep going and keep the firm alive. Kate is "practical" in her belief that Larry will return—even though this "practicality" is actually an irrational unwillingness to accept the overwhelmingly likely scenario that Larry is really gone.

And Chris's "practicality" takes on many forms. He knows that it is "practical" to get married and start a family. But love is also not a practical consideration in its fullest form—and Chris really does love Ann. He is not marrying her because he is just "standing in for" Larry—he is doing so because he loves Ann and wishes to start a family of his own. The only practical consideration for turning Joe in, then, would be to expiate the family's guilt, and to atone for their sins.

If you can't get used to it [the Keller family money], then throw it away. You hear me? Take every cent and give it to charity, throw it in the sewer. Does that settle it? . . .

Related Characters: Joe Keller (speaker), Chris Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81-2

Explanation and Analysis

Joe wonders whether the guilt that Chris feels is related to the money that the firm has made. Of course, this is a part of it—Chris has expressed, here and elsewhere, that the company's profits, if indeed they are tied to a willingness to overlook the faulty plane components, would be stained with the blood of those who died in the airplanes during the war. Joe, in his qualified willingness to expiate the family's guilt, argues that the money can be refused—and that, in taking the money, Chris is complicit in the family's crimes.

But the guilt runs much deeper than this, and Joe and Chris both appear to realize it. The only way to atone for what has happened in the past is to *admit* it. This means, for Chris, that Joe would have to acknowledge and take responsibility for his actions. Yet Joe still seems incapable of doing this—which is what frustrates and saddens Chris most of all.

Chris, a man can't be a Jesus in this world!

Related Characters: Joe Keller (speaker), Chris Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Joe's statement is fraught with meaning. "Chris," the name of Joe's son, echoes "Christ," itself a tragic pun when joined with the "Jesus" of his following exclamation. Joe believes that he cannot behave perfectly—that no man can. But, of course, Chris has not asked that his father be perfect. Chris would naturally have preferred that the past didn't take place—that Larry would instead be alive, and that Joe would not have been responsible for the crimes he has committed. But given all that, Chris only wants Joe to admit his guilt.

This does not mean that Joe would have to be a perfect man, or an example to others. Rather, Chris is just asking that his father be a moral man, one capable of, and willing to, acknowledge his flaws. This, Chris believes, will help the family to move forward. This is the only way to deal with the traumatic past—by admitting what really did take place and facing it directly.

The war is over! Didn't you hear? It's over!
Then what was Larry to you? A stone that fell into the water? It's not enough for him [Joe] to be sorry. Larry didn't kill himself to make you and Dad sorry.
What more can we be!

Related Characters: Kate Keller, Chris Keller (speaker), Larry Keller, Joe Keller

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Kate's statement—The war is over!—means that the past is really in the past, that there is nothing anyone can do to change it. Kate believes that, whatever crimes Joe committed, whatever guilt the family bears, they must be ignored if the family is to continue on into the future. This is why the Kellers remained in the neighborhood and lived their lives as though nothing had happened.

But Larry also remains the reason why the Kellers cannot fully let go of the war. Because Kate holds out hope that Larry will, in fact, return, the war is never truly relegated to the past in the Keller household. Instead, Larry's continual "possibility" of reappearance, though it really is no possibility, forces Kate to relive the war each day. She cannot, and will not, move beyond it.

Chris points out that Larry did not die to hurt anyone. Indeed, Larry was a victim of Joe's sins, and Joe must acknowledge this in order for everyone's lives to continue. The past must be addressed. Joe finally does this, quickly and summarily, before killing himself, and only then does Kate tell Ann and Chris to move away, to begin new lives apart from the Keller family.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

The play opens in the hedged-in backyard of the Keller home, with Joe Keller, head of the family, father of two boys, husband to Katie Keller, sitting outside reading the paper alongside his friend and neighbor Dr. Jim Bayliss. Keller has two sons: one, Chris, who works with him in the family business, and one, Larry, who died flying a mission in the Second World War. The play is set is a non-specified suburban American town, immediately after the war.

It is important that the name of the small town is never revealed—Miller, the playwright, wishes to make the town seem like it could be anywhere in the United States. For Miller, the town and its below-the-surface troubles stand in for the troubles the entire nation faced in the aftermath of the Second World War.

As the play begins, Frank Lubey, Joe's neighbor on the side of the property opposite Jim's, enters the backyard and tells Joe and Jim he (Frank) is "walking off his breakfast." Joe offers Frank part of the paper to read—Joe himself is reading the want ads, to "see what people want"—but Frank declines politely, saying all the news in the paper is bad news anyway.

This is an important point Joe makes, one that will come back later in the play: Joe is concerned, foremost, with what the family "wants" and needs, and it is this desire to provide materially for the family that causes Joe to authorize the production of the faulty plane parts.

Frank asks Joe what's happened to a **tree** in the backyard, a tree Joe reveals was planted as a memorial to Larry, his son lost in the war. Joe says a storm the previous night sheared the tree in half, and Frank remarks that this is especially poignant, since Larry's birthday was in August. Joe is surprised and touched that Frank remembers Larry's birthday, and Frank reveals that he is assembling a horoscope for Larry to determine Larry's "favorable days." Larry went missing on November 25, and Frank tells Joe that, if the 25th is one of Larry's favorable days, this would indicate, via the horoscope, that Larry is still alive.

Frank's astrology is perhaps not actually persuasive to Kate, but Kate seems, later on, to appreciate that Frank is holding out hope that Larry might still be alive. As will be shown, most of the rest of the neighborhood has already accepted as fact the idea that Larry died in the war, and that the Keller family must make its way in the world with only one of its two sons. Larry's tree, then, is not a hasty memorial, but a fitting one: for a dead soldier.

Frank then notices Jim (he hadn't seen him before in the yard), and Jim tells Frank he's crazy for believing in astrology. Jim complains about his income as a general-practitioner physician, but he knows he would make less as a medical researcher—which was his dream career as a younger man. Jim also asks whether Ann is in the house, and Joe says she is, still getting ready for the day and eating breakfast—Ann was a girl who used to live in the neighborhood and date Larry, and she remains a friend of the Keller family.

Annie's presence in the small town coincides not just with the shearing of Larry's tree by the wind, but with the later revelations of Joe's involvement in the production of the faulty parts. Annie is, in this way, the unwitting, and unwilling, catalyst of the drama that will wind up tearing the Keller family apart.

Jim's wife Sue enters, saying there is a phone call for Jim (a patient asking for care); Jim complains that patients imagine their medical ailments, but that he needs the money and therefore needs more patients; Sue, who is overweight and sensitive about her body, feigns jealousy, since the patient on the phone is female. Lydia Lubey, Frank's wife, enters the lawn through the hedges and tells Frank that the toaster is broken. Frank, who remarks on Lydia's lack of technological skill, heads off-stage to address the toaster problem.

These two marriages are, to an extent, a study in opposites. Sue has "trapped" Jim in a life and career Jim does not want, and both Jim and Sue know it. But Frank and Lydia appear to be happy and blessed—they have three children, and Lydia, later on, seems unable to believe her good fortune. Frank, too, feels he must consult the stars to determine his own good luck, since he was kept out of the war, being too old, by mere months, for the draft.

Chris comes downstairs, and Joe greets him, asking how Annie's doing; Chris says she's doing fine and asks for the book section of the newspaper. A boy from the neighborhood named Bert enters to speak with Joe; Joe is playing a long-term game with Bert, where Bert surveys the neighborhood as part of a volunteer police force and reports any information he's learned back to Joe. Bert asks Joe if he can see the "jail" in the basement of the Keller house, but Joe says Bert has to wait a while longer to see this fictitious basement jail.

It is never explained to whom Bert is related, or how Joe comes to know Bert. In this sense, Bert is more of a stand-in for all the children of the small town, who appear to like and respect Joe. But Joe's relationship with Bert, as evidenced by the "jailhouse" game they play, is nevertheless tinged with the scandal that has haunted Joe since the war, the scandal that put Steve, Annie's father, in prison.

Chris and Joe look at the shorn **tree** that once memorialized Larry. Chris tells Joe, to Joe's surprise, that Kate, Joe's wife and Chris's mother, has already seen the tree in its broken state; she was outside when the wind broke it. Chris tells Joe, as Joe already knows, that Kate has trouble sleeping, and was pacing outside when the damage occurred the previous night. Chris tells Joe that the tree's partial destruction caused Kate to run back inside and weep in the bathroom the remainder of the night.

Kate's nightmares, which seem to haunt her much of the time, are no so much premonitions or reenactments of Larry's fate; they are instead dark, shadowy summaries of the information Kate already knows: that Larry has gone missing during a flight. This is all Kate will ever learn of Larry's whereabouts, until she reads Larry's letter to Annie at the end of the play.

Chris continues talking to his father, saying that they (he and his father) have "made a mistake" with Kate because they have kept her under the false impression that Larry might still be alive, even though he went missing in battle three years before. Chris has given up all hope of Larry being found alive; Joe seems to think it is possible, however slightly, that Larry is still living, but he keeps up the ruse of "waiting for Larry" mostly to satisfy Kate, who will not give up hope, and who believes Larry could come home at any moment.

Here, Joe's role in the family is made more evident. He is the peacemaker, the conciliator between Chris and Kate. Chris, for his own reasons (namely, wanting to marry Annie), believes that it is important to move on from Larry's death. But Kate cannot bear the thought of Larry being gone. And so Joe must decide whose fragile emotional state to privilege and protect.

Chris pulls closer to his father and continues talking. He tells Joe that he invited Annie to visit because he wants to ask her to marry him, even though he knows that Annie was once "Larry's girl," and even though Kate will not approve of the union—since it will mean, symbolically, that Larry is truly dead, and that Chris, Annie, and the rest of the Keller family and have moved on from Larry's death.

This is another motif running throughout the play: the idea that the war "scrambled" the town's notion of who should end up with whom, romantically speaking. Larry and Annie were together, as were George and Lydia; but now Chris and Annie, and Lydia and Frank, are couples.

Joe is nervous about how this news will affect Kate, and he refuses to tell Chris, in a straightforward manner, how he feels about Chris marrying Annie—Joe is primarily worried that the news will cause Kate distress. Chris complains that Joe wants to fade into the background on important decisions; Chris also says that he has "reached for things" his entire life, and that, now, he knows what he wants, and is going to take it. Joe asks if Annie feels the same way about Chris, and Chris admits that he hasn't talked about it explicitly with Annie, but that her letters indicate she would be open to a proposal.

Chris, here, describes himself as someone who always wanted the family to get along, even after Larry's disappearance, and Chris believes that he has sacrificed some of his own happiness to make sure that the family has remained intact. But Chris has also benefitted a great deal from the financial success of Keller, Inc., and Chris knows this, and feels guilty, to an extent, for his wealth, which his brother never had a chance to earn.

At the high point of their argument, Chris threatens to marry Annie and run away to New York City—where Annie currently lives—in order to start a new, married life there. Joe is shocked that Chris would consider giving up the family business, one that Joe has worked hard to build up and hand over, eventually, to his son. Without their argument being resolved, Kate walks outside and sees them talking; interrupting, she asks Joe if he threw out a bag of potatoes in the kitchen, and Joe admits that he did, by accident.

New York City is the symbolic "other place" in the novel—it is far from the small-town atmosphere of the unnamed suburb in which the play takes place. Annie and George both escape to New York in order to obtain some anonymity, following the trial that put their father, Steve, in jail, and ruined the family name in the small town.

Joe grumbles about needing a maid around the house to help his wife, and Kate reminds Joe that they have a maid, and that today is her day off. Joe sits off to the side, and Chris helps Kate peel green beans for dinner. Kate complains of a bad night's sleep and said she has something like, but not quite, a headache—when Chris tries to prime his mother about Annie's appearance, hoping Kate will be happy to have Annie around, Kate seems confused as to why Annie is visiting the Keller home. But Kate also says she likes the fact that Annie has not moved on from Larry and gotten married. Kate complains that many women whose husbands or boyfriends died in the war wasted no time in finding new spouses.

To Kate, it is important that everyone else in her life maintain at least the semblance of waiting for Larry to return. This means that Annie cannot move on in any way from Larry—certainly not by marrying Chris—and that Chris, too, and Joe must expect Larry to burst through the door at any moment. This notion, that Larry's disappearance could magically be fixed, even three years later, makes Kate's psychological state, of total expectancy, essentially unbearable—she is going mad with grief. Through Kate the play is suggesting that America too, despite its post-war material wealth, is still suffering from all the absences caused by the war.

Chris becomes upset with his mother, indicating to her that, perhaps, Annie is no longer mourning Larry, and that she has waited to get married for other reasons. But Kate will have none of that. She instead tells Chris about her dream of the previous night, the dream that caused her to go outside. In it, she was up in the air with Larry, but Larry began falling rapidly toward earth, and as Kate ran outside to catch him, she saw his **tree** cut in half by the wind. Kate says that she knew that should have waited longer to plant a tree in Larry's memory.

Ironically, Kate feels that they have begun memorializing Larry "too soon," while nearly everyone else in the town, with the possible exception of Frank, believes, and has believed for a long time, that Larry is dead, and that a memorial for him is long overdue. In this way, the tree represents not just a memorial for Larry's life, but a reminder that his death is real—that he is not coming back.

Chris is shocked to hear that Kate believes it is "too soon" to be mourning Larry. Chris says that the **tree**'s being cut in half has no significance for Larry's life or death, and he says the family ought to try to move on and forget the idea that Larry might be alive. Kate asks Chris to fetch her aspirin, instead of answering him directly, and turns to Joe, still in the yard, asking Joe why Annie has come to visit. Joe claims he has no more information about it than Kate does, but Kate realizes Chris wants to marry Annie, and says she will not permit it: Annie is "Larry's girl" to Kate.

Another important through-line running in the play—the idea that members of the family pretend not to know what they do, in fact, know deep down. Kate, here, indicates to Joe that she understands why Annie has come to visit—she wants to marry Chris—even though Kate pretends to all those assembled that she has no idea what Annie could want with the Keller family.

Kate reminds Joe of the other Americans presumed lost in the war who have returned home, but Joe says the chances of Larry returning are very slim. Kate still believes, or wants to believe, that Annie, too, is waiting for Larry to return. As the two are talking, Bert comes back to report to Joe on his sweep of the neighborhood, and asks again to see the jail in the Keller cellar, but Kate snaps at Bert, claiming there is no jail there. Joe is upset, saying he has "nothing to hide," and Kate agrees that Joe has nothing to hide; Bert seems confused by these cryptic comments and by Kate's shouting, and leaves the property.

A first foreshadowing of the fact that Joe's guilt is a major thing, something else the family has been keeping quiet for several years. In their very insistence that Joe has nothing to hide, Kate and Joe make it seem, quite naturally for the audience, that in fact Joe does *have something he needs to explain—it will be revealed that this has to do with Steve and the manufacturing fiasco that placed him in prison.*

Just then, Annie comes out with Chris to say hello to Joe and Kate. Joe is happy to see Annie and tells her how beautiful she is, but Kate seems upset and wants only to critique Annie's appearance, especially after Chris says how beautiful she is, too. Jim comes over and meets Annie, and Annie remarks that it wasn't so long ago she and her family lived in what is now the Bayliss house, and played around with the Keller boys along with her brother, George. Jim is called back to his house by Sue, for another phone call with a patient.

Kate, once again, is shown to be a masterful manipulator, and an armchair psychologist. She realizes that Chris wants her to say that Annie looks beautiful, because Chris himself is in love with Annie. Kate, wanting their relationship not to continue, decides instead to critique Annie's appearance, to make her feel not wanted in the Keller home.

Annie tells Chris, in front of Joe and Kate, that she's surprised he has so many clothes, but Chris reveals that Annie is staying in Larry's old room, and that the clothes and shoes, still shined by Kate, are Larry's—Annie seems shocked by this, and wonders aloud whether Kate is still waiting for Larry to return. Annie admits, after some prodding by Kate, that she is not dating anyone seriously, but when Kate sees this as evidence Annie is waiting for Larry to return, and tells Annie as much, Annie replies, flatly, that she is not waiting for Larry, and that Kate must be the only mother still in America to do so, after three long years.

An especially poignant scene. It is so hard for Annie to imagine the extent to which Kate still grieves for Larry—and expects him to return—that Annie cannot believe Kate would have kept Larry's clothes and continued to shine his shoes, as if he might walk through the door that evening. This is the first indication, to Annie, that she has underestimated Kate's opposition to the idea that Annie and Chris might be married.

Joe and Kate also ask after Annie's father, Steve, and mother—there seems to have been some trouble in their relationship, and Annie tells them, obliquely, that her parents won't get divorced, that she doesn't want anything to do with her father, and that eventually her father will get out of jail, where he is incarcerated for an as-yet-unrevealed crime, and will join Annie's mother in New York.

Little is heard in the play about Annie's mother, who appears simply to be waiting patiently for her husband to return to her. Annie's mother has moved to New York, however, to get away from the overwhelming attention paid to the Deever family in the small town.

Frank comes over and says hello; Annie remarks that Frank is growing bald, and Kate tells Annie that Frank has three kids with Lydia now. Annie and Frank appear uncomfortable around one another, especially Frank, and it seems they had some kind of courtship, or the inkling of one, in the past. Frank bids Annie a hasty goodbye after asking about her father in prison, saying he should be let out soon.

Frank, in his guileless attempts to be nice to Annie, doesn't realize that, in fact, he's stepped right into the hornet's nest that Annie's visit has occasioned—by bringing up Annie's father's imprisonment. Frank will come back later, also at a dramatic time, to tell Kate about Larry's astrological data.

Annie turns to Chris and asks him if the neighborhood is still talking about her father's trial and imprisonment. Although Chris assures her that they aren't, Annie worries that the issues have never gone away in the small town. Joe, who seems also to have been involved in the trial, says that, when he was exonerated after a re-trial (the trial which appears, also, to have sent Steve to jail), he walked home with his head held high, and although some women in the block refused to speak to him at first, and considered him a "murderer," Joe kept on doing his business in the community, and eventually regained all the friends he had appeared to lose during his trial. Joe does not go into specifics about the nature of the trial, though—the audiences is left guessing as to its true nature.

Now Joe reveals more of the story—that he and Steve worked together, and that only Joe had the "guts" to walk back through the community pretending as though nothing was wrong. Joe was right, in a way—he was of a strong enough disposition that he was able to carry on in the small town as though his name had not been sullied by the scandal at the manufacturing plant. But Joe has only buried his wrongdoing, and he seems to sense, even at this point in the play, that the truth will come out, and that it will not paint him as being completely innocent of the charges against him.

Joe tells Annie that her father and mother should move back to town after her father is released from jail. Joe says this is the only way to "lick" those who would call her father a traitor, a murderer, an evil man. Joe asks if Annie ever talks to her father in prison, and Annie says she does not; she thinks he *is* a murderer, and Chris appears to agree, saying that Steve "killed" 21 American pilots in the war. Again, this fact is not explained further.

It is interesting to note that the only character in the play to differentiate between murder and unintentional homicide is Joe, who claims later that, though Steve made a mistake, he did not kill those American pilots in cold blood. Apparently, the courts, too, chose to try Steve on a low-degree murder count.

Annie goes so far as to wonder whether her father's negligence didn't kill Larry, who happened to go missing in a plane crash. But Kate begs Annie never to say again that her father's negligent act was responsible for Larry's going missing—Kate cannot handle this possibility and goes inside, clearly upset. Joe turns, somewhat angrily, to Annie, and explains to her that she knows Larry never flew P-40s, and that the malfunction for which Steve was apparently responsible—a manufacturing error—had nothing to do with the kind of plane Larry would have flown.

This is the nerve that ties together the Larry plotline and the Joe-Steve plotline: the idea that, somehow, the problem at the manufacturing plant had something to do with Larry's disappearance. Later on, Kate will state that it is simply "unnatural" for a father to kill his son, even by accident, and the knowledge that Joe has indirectly done just that is enough to send Joe to suicide in the final act.

Joe continues, explaining to Annie what her father has done (and, simultaneously, providing the audience with more context): Steve and Joe worked together in Joe's business (Steve was Joe's direct subordinate), and Steve OK'd the production of parts he knew to be flawed for placement in American airplanes, since he was afraid that, if the flaws were discovered, the company would lose the contract and a great deal of business. Thus Steve painted over the cracks in a small batch of parts, making them appear whole; they were then installed in American fighter planes, 21 of which crashed, killing their pilots. Steve and Joe were both charged with criminal wrongdoing in the pilots' deaths, but Joe managed to be exonerated, claiming that the idea to pass off the faulty parts was entirely Steve's, and that Steve acted alone.

Here the nature of the drama between Joe and Steve is revealed, in full. Steve, here and elsewhere, is described as a man who seems to know right from wrong, but is too nervous to stand up for what he believes in, especially in the face of the overwhelming pressure that Joe seemed capable of asserting within the company. If Joe was something of a control freak and a bully, then Steve was someone who let himself be controlled and bullied by his superior—for, after all, Steve could have stopped production himself, had he felt it necessary at the time.

Joe tells Annie that her father is not a bad man, that he just made a mistake, and that he's no murderer. Chris becomes angry with his father for even bringing up this whole mess, which seems to have been a major event in the Keller family and in Annie's, but Annie tells Chris that Joe is just trying to keep the peace and make everyone around him happy. Joe peps up—the "heavy" conversation is over, and he tells Chris and Annie to get ready for a nice dinner they'll be having that evening.

Here, Joe makes the distinction between making a mistake—an instance of wrongdoing—and being a "bad" person, or someone who is incapable of doing the right thing. Joe makes this distinction, we find out later, because he himself feels that, though what he did was wrong, he nevertheless did it for a good reason—to help his family.

Joe goes inside, leaving Chris and Annie alone. Annie tells Chris he's been acting strange so far on her visit, and Chris, with Annie's urging, bumbles into his revelation: that he's in love with Annie and hopes to marry her. Annie has figured this to be true all along, and tells Chris she loves him, too, and that she has waited for Chris because they have started up a correspondence again over the past two years. They kiss, and Annie tells Chris to kiss her like he means it, and not like he's just Larry's brother. Annie asks Chris if Chris is ashamed about their union, and Chris says no, but that he is worried what his parents, especially his mother, will say when they announce their engagement.

Another secret that someone has done a bad job of hiding. This time, Chris is hiding a happy secret from Annie, but she is smart and has great interpersonal intelligence, and she rapidly realizes exactly why Chris has asked her to come visit the family. Chris and Annie then decide they must figure out a way to break the news to Joe and Kate in a convincing fashion, and Annie senses, rightly, that Chris must confront his relationship with his own father before the wedding can take place.

Chris tells Annie that he's not "ashamed" to be courting his brother's girl, but that he feels guilty, somewhat, at the life he leads now—a life that only those who survived the war can have. He tells Annie a brief story about a young soldier, in the war, who lent him his (the soldier's) only remaining pair of **dry socks**; this kind of brotherhood, Chris says, was commonplace in the war, but now, he feels he can only live a kind of sterile American fantasy: make money, drive a fancy car, and continue his life in the family business.

A very important scene in the novel. Here, Chris seems not to recognize just what he's saying—he wants the world of the post-war era to resemble the moral certitude of the war itself. But Chris does not recognize how complicated the war was, as well—that it was manufactured as a battle of good vs. evil for the sake of the soldiers, but that, like anything else in life, the war contained moral ambiguities and moral choices.

At that, however, Chris turns to Annie and says that he will make her a fortune—Annie replies that she doesn't need a fortune, and wouldn't know what to do with one, and Chris, having snapped out of his reverie about war-time versus peacetime life, kisses Annie. Joe comes outside again and briefly teases the two of them for kissing, then tells Annie that her brother, George, is on the line, long-distance, from Columbus. Annie is doubly shocked: to hear that George is calling to her, and to know that George is in Columbus, which is where her father is in jail.

George, in this sense, is the consummate bearer of bad news—he arrives with new information from his father, and, like Annie, he comes into the Keller family with information that can tear it apart. But whereas Annie does not want to harm the Keller family, George expressly does—he wishes to make up for the wrong he feels Joe has done to his father, Steve.

Annie goes inside to answer George's phone call. Chris tells his father that he and Annie are getting married, and Joe seems unaffected by this news, as though he has something more important to tell Chris. Joe asks if Chris, too, doesn't find it a bit of a coincidence that Annie comes to visit at the same time George is visiting Annie and George's father in jail. Chris isn't sure of what his father is insinuating; Joe asks, straight-out, if Annie still harbors a grudge against Joe for her father's prison term, since Joe averred that Steve acted alone, without Joe's input, in OK'ing the production of the cracked parts. This was what enabled Joe to get off scot-free, and what put Steve in jail.

Joe begins to worry that Annie is on some kind of "spying" mission for the Deever family, and that she and George are working together, attempting to pay the Keller's back for what they've done to Steve and his wife. But Chris refuses to believe that Annie could do that to him or to the Kellers, and, as it turns out, Chris is right: Annie has come to visit with the purest of intentions, and it is only George, with his desire for revenge, who wants explicitly to harm the Kellers out of a sense of retribution.

After Chris insists that Annie's visit would have nothing to do with George, and that Annie harbors no grudge against Joe for her father's fate (in fact, she strictly blames her father), Joe appears cheered, saying he wants to build Chris a big house, wants to change the name of the company from J. O. Keller to Christopher Keller, Inc., and announcing that he is excited about Chris's wedding to Annie.

Joe's way of dealing with difficult emotions is to rely on a sense of "love" for his family that he expresses through material goods or wealth. Thus, here, Joe shows Chris that he loves him by saying that he'll give Chris a larger share of the company, and will build him a home as a physical representation of fatherly love.

Annie comes back on-stage and announces that her brother is taking the seven-o'clock train from Columbus to the small town, and that he has something important he wants to discuss regarding his father with Joe. Annie, clearly shaken, tells Chris she wants to go for a drive, and the two exit to do so. Kate comes outside and warns Joe that George's arrival can't bode well—George, now a lawyer living in New York, would need a significant reason to visit his father in Columbus (his first visit in three years to his father's jail cell), and then to visit Joe in the small town. Joe, agitated, says all will be well when George visits, but Kate warns him that he'd "better be smart," prepared to answer whatever questions George has for him.

Here, again, Kate's comments to Joe seem to indicate that, in fact, Joe does have something to hide from George—or, at the very least, that Joe has a certain amount of explaining that will change the way George looks at the manufacturing fiasco and his father's imprisonment. George's presence, as will be shown later in the play, is a destabilizing one, and the family begins to rally when he arrives, attempting to cover their tracks and many of the dark secrets they've been hiding (knowingly or unknowingly) the last three years.

ACT 2

The Act opens on the evening of the same day. Chris is outside, in dress pants but no shirt, clearing away the brush from Larry's sheared **tree**. Kate comes out, not yet dressed for dinner, to see what Chris is doing. Kate tells Chris that Joe is sleeping—that he always sleeps when he's worried—and that Chris has to "protect" Kate and Joe from whatever George wants with the family, when he visits. Kate believes that George has never given up the idea that Joe is the one who ordered Steve to OK the faulty parts; Kate worries that George has come with new information about the trial and Steve's imprisonment. Kate also wonders aloud whether Annie is "in on" George's plan to ruin the Keller family.

Because the action of the play takes place entirely in one 24-hour period, it maintains something that Greek tragedians and philosophers (namely Aristotle) called the "unity of action." Miller's plays are often built upon the fundamentals of the Greek dramatic tradition, and the family drama of All My Sons, the death of a son and eventually the death of a father, are motifs that play out time and again in Greek plays from before the common era.

Chris forcefully but still politely objects to the idea that Annie has anything to do with George's visit. Annie comes outside, and Kate goes inside to get ready for dinner. Annie and Chris agree that they will inform Kate formally, tonight, of their intention to marry; Chris then goes inside to put on a shirt for dinner. Sue comes into the yard, where Annie is now alone, looking for Jim; they begin having a conversation. At first, Sue appears to be happy Annie is visiting, and the conversation is civil, but very quickly Sue takes on an accusatory tone. She tells Annie she finds it "odd" that Annie would consider marrying the brother of her old sweetheart.

The dinner that everyone in the family seems to want to have together will never come to pass—George's entrance will thwart it, and though Kate will do what she can to convince George to "be civil," they never do sit down at one table and break bread together. Dinner, in this sense, represents the possibility of reconciliation between George and Annie, between George and Joe—and this reconciliation will never come to pass.

Annie brushes off this criticism, but Sue continues, saying that, if Annie and Chris do marry, Sue and Jim want them to move somewhere far away. Annie is shocked by this, but Sue continues that Jim, who does not make much money in his general practice, but who nevertheless wanted an even lower-paying job as a medical researcher before Sue made him start seeing patients, envies Chris a great deal. Sue is not sure that Jim could stand having Chris married to a beautiful girl, living next door in the successful Keller household.

Although in the beginning of the play Sue appeared to be kind, she is in fact quite the gossip, and she seems to think it is her duty to inform Annie of the way the neighborhood feels about Chris and Joe. Annie cannot believe that Sue would feel this way, but more importantly, Annie can't believe that Sue would hide her true feelings from Chris and Joe, and would pretend, as she does, simply to be their "good friendly neighbor." Behind the veneer of cheerfulness and neighborliness of the postwar boom is something more complicated.

Sue then becomes even more pointed in her criticisms: she tells Annie that she and Jim "know" that Joe merely lied to get out of jail time and to put Steve in prison; she says she hates living next to the "Holy Family," the Kellers, and she finds Chris's "phony idealism" to be immensely frustrating. Annie cannot believe what she's hearing, but as Sue is winding up her complaints, Chris comes back outside, dressed, and Sue is polite with him, then leaves to go back to the Bayliss house. Chris seems happy to be outside with Annie, but Annie is upset at Sue's comments.

The first strong indication that Joe is hiding his guilt in the Steve case—here, Sue seems to indicate that Joe's guilt is common knowledge, although Sue respects the fact that Joe had the "guts" to return to the small town and carry on with life as usual. Jim will echo this sentiment to Kate in the final act, when he tells her that Joe is simply a good and well-equipped liar, and that perhaps Chris is not.

After Sue leaves, Chris begins saying how much he likes her, and that she's a good nurse, but Annie snaps, immediately, that Sue "hates" Chris and the Kellers—she doesn't understand how Chris can be so nice and forgiving to everyone. Annie asks Chris why he pretended that the whole town had forgotten about the Joe-Steve affair, and Chris says he was worried, at first, that Annie would find it strange to come back to town to visit, if she knew the neighbors were still thinking about the faulty parts scandal.

Here is evidence not of Chris's lying, but of his willingness to withhold key information in order to get Annie to do what he wants. In this case, Chris did not tell Annie the extent to which the town still stewed over the case involving her father and Joe. Chris did this out of self-interest—because he wants nothing to come between himself and Annie.

Annie tells Chris that he must be prepared to "leave his family behind" if it is revealed that Joe had something to do with the faulty parts. Chris takes this news hard, and is unwilling to abandon his family in that way, but Annie replies that she has given up her own father; she also says that George's visit is probably not in the form of a marital "blessing," and that Chris must be prepared for a bitter confrontation with him.

Annie, like Kate, has a sense that George has not come to chit-chat with Joe, or to catch up casually. In this way, both the "women" of the play, the strong female leads of Kate and Annie, recognize George's motives before the male leads, Chris and Joe, have a chance to do so—perhaps Chris and Joe merely want to think the best of people—or, more likely, they bury their heads in the sand when confronted with the truth.

Joe comes outside and now seems happy at the idea that Chris and Annie are in love—he sees them together and assumes they are once again sharing a quiet moment outside. Joe tells Annie, quite seriously, that he's been thinking, and that he could set George up with a lawyer job in the small town, and, additionally, could probably find a job for Steve back at Keller, Inc. Annie is surprised that Joe would want to do anything for either man, and Chris says it is Annie's right to not want to talk to her own father, but Joe becomes immensely upset at this, saying that "a father's a father," before calming himself and walking back inside to shave.

More evidence of Joe's desire to let bygones be bygones—and to bury his head in the sand. Joe's offer to welcome Steve back into the company fold is an impossible one, and Annie appears most surprised that Joe would believe, even for a moment, that her father could accept such an offer. Joe, for his part, truly does believe that such an offer is feasible—in fact, Joe believes this is the only way the family can move on after the whole terrible ordeal, by sticking to the plan, by staying in town.

Jim arrives with George—he has picked George up at the train station. Leaving George in the car, Jim walks up to Chris and Annie, still outside, to tell Chris that he ought to drive George somewhere farther away and try to "talk sense" to him at a remote location. Jim is worried that George's anger, which Jim believes to have to do with the Joe-Steve affair, will only cause Kate grief, and Jim is worried about Kate's fragile state of mind. But Chris says George ought to come inside, and as he almost exits the stage to find George in the car, George enters, looking anxious and bedraggled, barely acknowledging his sister Annie.

The delay between George's arrival in town, as telegraphed by Jim, and his arrival onstage, is an instance of the building of dramatic tension—something of which Arthur Miller was a consummate master. It is more exciting for the audience to know that George lurks in the wings, than it is to be confronted with George's yelling, screaming, and fuming all at once. Miller manipulates these instances of drama in order to catch and hold the attention of the audience member.

George then says hello, gruffly, to Sue, and asks whether she and Jim are the people that bought their old house (the Deever house). Sue says they are and invites George to see the changes they've made; George says he liked the house better before. George drinks some of the grape beverage Kate has set out for him—an old favorite—but announces sourly to Ann and Chris that he's been to see his father, who looks "smaller" now in prison; George also says, cryptically, to Chris, that one should expect only to make a sucker of a man once, not twice. Chris presumes George is talking about Joe's relationship to Steve.

George announces, from the start, that he is on a mission of vengeance. George's notion of retribution is also a very "Greek" one, in the sense that, unlike a Christian notion of reconciliation, George is demanding that Joe pay for the damage he did to Steve's life and to George's entire family. George's belief that Annie cannot associate with the Kellers is another instance of a "Greek" notion of family bonds, which are unbreakable, and which rely first on blood, rather than marriage. What was revolutionary about Miller is that he applies the classical Greek template, which in Greek plays always focused on royalty and heroes, to a common American family.

George then asks Annie, gruffly, if she's married yet to Chris; Annie says she's not yet married, and George announces that Annie will not marry Chris at all, and implies that, before Annie left New York to visit the small town, she told George that she was going with the intention to marry Chris. This prompted remorse in George, who wanted to tell Steve of Annie's impending marriage; thus George flew to Columbus to see Steve, where Steve told him, in person, the true story of the Joe-Steve affair.

George uses the prerogative reserved for older brothers in many societies, including some in the present day: that an older brother must agree to have his sister married off to another man. Although this is not in line with contemporary values, or even with the values of the 1940s, it is very much of a piece with a "Greek" sensibility the play uses for tragic effect.

George tells Annie and Chris, in the yard, that Joe ordered Steve, on the phone three years ago, to weld over the defective parts, then Joe pretended he was sick with flu, keeping him from going down to the factory himself to oversee the welding. Joe knew he could always deny the phone call, and that Steve would be made the "patsy" while Joe would get off scot-free. Chris does not believe George, telling him that this is the same story Steve told in court, but George has a new fire in his eyes, and now believes that the Keller family ruined the Deevers.

George's belief that his father was merely a patsy is not, after all, the exact truth; the real truth is more complicated, and is not flattering either to Joe or to Steve. If Joe gave the order to shellac the parts, then Steve followed that order, even though he knew it was wrong to do so—and this means that Steve bears some of the moral culpability for his actions. But George prefers to think that Joe is entirely to blame.

Chris tells George that Steve is a timid man who wants to shift the blame to someone else; but George counters that Joe was such an overbearing and exacting boss, it seems almost impossible that he would have let over 100 parts roll of the line without inspecting them himself. Chris admits to George that he has considered, in his quieter moments, whether his father was perhaps guilty of passing off the defective parts, but Chris says that, despite this, he believes in his father's innocence. George is insistent that Joe is guilty, however, and says he will take Annie away—that Annie is the last "prize" that the Kellers will not be allowed to take from the Deevers.

Chris here for the first time acknowledges that he has considered the possibility of his father's guilt. This seems an honest response—for his father was a control freak in the factory, and it appears unlikely that something so important as the shipment of over 100 parts would happen without his supervision. But Chris is also loyal to his father, and though the possibility of Joe's complicity in the crime is sensible, Chris doesn't want to be sensible—he wants his father to be innocent.

But Kate comes outside and, sensing there is trouble, tries to soothe George, talking about his favorite foods, which she says she'll cook for him, and about the old neighborhood. George seems at least temporarily placated, and Kate agrees that they will have a dinner at the house that night, instead of going out; but Chris tells George that, if he stays for the evening, there will be no more arguing. Lydia comes over and shyly says hello to George; it appears that, like Annie and Frank, George and Lydia had a long-ago courtship, and George is surprised to learn that Lydia has three children.

An instance of dramatic foils in the plot. Just as Annie and Frank are "paired" way back in the past—a courtship is hinted at, and Frank seems to maintain some amount of affection for Annie—George and Lydia were also paired before the war, but George, with his lack of luck, was sent off to battle, while lucky Frank was left at home to marry Lydia and start a family. In this sense, George feels, once again, that the war has stolen this too from him.

Lydia tells George that she wound up with Frank, in part, because Frank never went to war, but always "just missed" the draft by a year (he was too old); that was why Frank took up an interest in astrology, since he believed that birth-dates had a great deal to do with a man's future. Lydia demurely goes back to her house, and George seems wistful that he did not marry her.

Frank, although he is given very little space in the drama, suffers from a more severe form of "survivor guilt" than Chris, for Frank never fought at all, and he will be dogged for the remainder of his life with the notion that he did not give of himself for his country.

At this, Joe comes downstairs and strains his "joviality" to welcome George. He asks how George is doing, and how Steve is; George says Steve seems "sick" in his soul, and that he hates Joe's guts, and would never accept the offer, which Joe makes to George, of a place for Steve at Keller, Inc. when Steve is released. Joe tells George that, though his father is a good man, Steve was never able to take the blame for his actions; Joe lists several instances in the past when, as a subordinate of Joe's, Steve made mistakes and then attempted to shift blame to someone else.

George formally disabuses Joe of the notion that Steve would be willing, under any circumstances, to accept a job from Joe, after what Joe has done to him. Although Joe acts as though this is surprising to him, on the surface, the audience seems to realize that Joe knows Steve would never accept the offer, and that Joe is merely offering it to Steve as a gesture of generosity—one that makes Joe seem like the bigger, and not guilty, man.

Kate comes outside again and finally convinces George to stay for dinner and get on the midnight train instead; George seems ready to agree, and, looking at Joe with a kinder eye, says Joe has not changed at all over the years. Kate jumps in to say that Joe hasn't been sick at all for fifteen years, and immediately George wonders about the time Joe called in sick the night of the production of the faulty parts. George corrects Joe and Kate, saying Joe was sick once, and though Joe and Kate attempt to cover their tracks, saying that they had forgotten about that single incident, George is once again suspicious that Joe and Kate are lying.

The dinner has thus achieved a kind of symbolic importance in the play—if Kate can manage to convince George to stay for it, then George is willing to let bygones be bygones, and perhaps no family secrets will be revealed the remainder of the day. But this dinner is simply not fated to happen, and the small slip of the tongue related to Joe's illness leads to the revelation of all the secrets related to the plant, and, later, regarding Larry's death.

Kate goes inside for a moment, and comes back out to announce that she's packed Annie's bag, and that Annie can leave with George. Chris and Annie both say that Annie will only leave when Chris wants her to, but George is now saying he wants to take Annie away immediately. Frank comes over, at this inopportune moment, to say he has finished his astrological calculations, and that November 25th was in fact a favorable day for Larry, meaning Larry "can't" have died on that day. Kate appreciates this information and sends Frank back to his home; Kate then turns to Joe and Chris, while Annie walks to the driveway to George to talk sense to him, and says that Chris will never marry Annie as long as she lives, because Larry is alive and Annie is Larry's girl.

Once again, Frank emerges at the least opportune possible moment. It appears that Frank's desire to find Larry's "fortunate day" is a genuine one, but at this point, even Kate appears tired of keeping up the charade that she cares about Larry's astrological charts. What Kate really cares about is the idea that, if Larry is dead, then in her mind Joe had something to do with that death; and a father killing his son, in Kate's words later on, is not permissible—it is an act against God. This is the true reason why Kate cannot let go of Larry.

Kate then screams to Joe and Chris that Chris has to understand something: if Larry is dead, then Joe "killed" him, and "God doesn't allow fathers to kill their sons." At this, Kate runs inside, distraught, and Chris realizes that Joe probably had something to do with the production of the faulty parts. Joe says, meekly, once again, that Larry never flew a P-40, the plane into which the defective parts went, but Chris presses him, and finally Joe confesses that he did give the OK order to produce the faulty parts and ship them, and that he did so to save the business, because he was worried about losing the government contract.

Joe's revelation that he sped up the production of the faulty parts because he did not want to lose the government contract and harm the family business and, by extension, his family—these are sensible reasons in the abstract, but they are used here to describe a monstrous act. Joe is responsible not just for the deaths of the pilots—he is responsible for ruining the life of a man, Steve, who deserved some but not all the blame heaped on him.

Chris can't believe that his father is responsible for the murder of 21 pilots, and though Joe keeps arguing that he's not responsible for Larry's death, Chris is too horrified by his father's actions to believe anything he says anymore. Chris tells his father, as the act ends, that as he (Chris) was out nearly dying in wartime to protect his country, his own father was selling bad parts to the army that ended up killing soldiers. Chris is devastated by this news, tearful and enraged.

Chris is horrified not just because of what his father his done. He is perhaps more horrified to know that his deepest fear—that his father was guilty—has been proved true, and that, now, Chris feels there is nothing in his life he can trust—his foundations have been so thoroughly shaken that he must go for a drive to think out his relationship to his family, based on this new information.

ACT 3

At the beginning of this short, final Act, Jim finds Kate outside, rocking on the porch by the backyard, at two in the morning. Kate tells Jim she is waiting for Chris to come back; he took the car, after his argument with Joe, and drove to an unknown place. Kate also tells Jim that Annie is upstairs in her room, and that she has been there since George took his cab away from the Keller house.

Unity of time and place is maintained—we are in the same set, the set of the entire play, and it is within one 24-hour period after the start of the play, although we are passed midnight and therefore technically on a different calendar day.

Jim alludes to the possibility of an argument between Chris and Joe over Annie, but Kate tells him, flat-out, that the argument was about George and Steve. Jim reveals that he has known, too, that Joe was responsible for the faulty parts, and that Joe, Kate, and he himself have a "talent for lying" that Chris does not possess—his father's secret has destroyed Chris, though it did not destroy the rest of the neighborhood. Jim tells Kate that he once left Sue for two months, and drove down to New Orleans, but that Sue came after him, found him, and brought him home.

Jim's revelation is another important one. Like Sue before him, Jim admits that he knew all along that Joe was probably guilty, and he was OK with that knowledge, because he felt that Joe was enough of a pillar in the community, and a courageous enough man, to deal with the mistake he had made during the war. Jim wonders if Chris has this same ability to forget his wrongdoings.

Joe comes outside to see how Kate is doing, and Jim goes offstage, saying he will take his car and drive around the park looking for Chris. Joe and Kate have a small argument, in which Kate says Joe always get angry when the chips are down, but that getting angry won't solve their current crisis. Kate tells Joe she believes that Annie has figured out the nature of Chris's argument with Joe, and that she therefore knows Joe is responsible for the parts. Kate tells Joe that Chris will want Joe to go to prison, but Joe says he can't do that, now, that decisions have been made and his life and family are settled. Kate says that she worries that war "changed" something in Chris, and Joe wonders aloud whether Larry wouldn't have been better equipped to deal with the "necessary compromises" Joe had to make to protect his business and his family.

One of the great and shocking ironies of the play. Joe believes that Larry was somehow the better son because he was more prepared to do what was necessary to preserve the family business, to make a profit, to ensure the material success of the family for the future. But, of course, Larry was even more affected by Joe's wrongdoing than Chris was—Larry could not live with the thought of it, and Larry's suicide is based entirely on his father's and Steve's actions in the war. Thus Joe has completely misjudged his son's character.

At this, Annie comes out to the porch, and sits silently for a moment with Joe and Kate. They find they have difficulty saying anything to one another—they all know what has transpired that night. But Annie finally speaks—she tells Kate that she wants Kate to speak directly to Chris, apologizing for keeping the memory of Larry alive. Annie vows that Larry is in fact dead, and that Kate knows it. But Kate protests—she feels that there is still hope Larry is alive. Annie says she has proof Larry is dead, and as Chris walks back onto the stage, exhausted after his night of ruminating, Kate reads the letter and moans, knowing that it proves Larry's death. Kate does not reveal the contents of the letter aloud, however, nor does Annie.

Another instance of using dramatic tension for great effect. Miller here knows that the audience probably understands, generally speaking, what is in Larry's letter, but Miller also knows that this revelation will be more powerful if he waits several moments to make the information public. In this way, Miller also shows how different characters react to the news—here, Kate is stricken silently, completely crushed inside, but still wanting to protect Joe from this information.

In the meantime, Joe has gone upstairs, unable to handle the family's trauma, and so he does not learn of the letter immediately. Chris asks Annie and Kate, who is in morbid shock, to sit down: he announces to both that he is leaving the small town to take a job in Cleveland, that he always doubted his father's innocence but worked for his father anyway, and that this action, this unwillingness to believe the truth, is proof of his own cowardice. But Annie says that she will go with Chris whether he wants, and Chris weighs whether or not to take her with him.

Annie, throughout this entire ordeal, remains an unshakeable rock, one who is devoted to Chris, devoted also to Larry's memory, devoted to the Keller family despite its flaws, and even devoted to her own father, though she felt that he received far greater punishment than was necessary, since it was Joe, first and foremost, who ordered that the parts be manufactured and put in the planes.

Chris also announces that he would not want his father to go to jail; that jail would not solve anything, now, nor would it truly punish the deed that his father has done. Joe comes outside to join Annie, Kate, and Chris, and tells Chris that, if Chris wants, he *will* go to jail (he has not heard Chris's previous words on the subject). Joe tells Chris that Chris also can give away all the family's earnings if Chris feels they have been tainted with the blood of American soldiers. Chris tells his father simply to get away from him, that he wants nothing to do with Joe.

Joe now realizes that he will do anything to make his son happy. Joe, importantly, does not offer to go to jail because it is the right thing to do—he offers to do it because he believes it's what Chris wants from him. But Chris doesn't want Joe to go to jail now*—he wants Joe to have faced up to his guilt several years ago. This is the great tragedy—that Joe's wrong cannot be repaid at this juncture.*

Annie takes the letter and, though Kate tries to intercept her, shoves it in Chris's hands, telling Chris it was the last thing Larry sent her—Annie does this, it seems, to persuade Chris to take her with him, since Larry is truly dead. Chris reads aloud, despite Kate's efforts to move Joe away from him (to keep Joe from hearing), that Larry was aware, overseas, of Steve and Joe's trial, and that, out of shame, Larry decided, the day after the letter, to pilot his plane intentionally into the sea, committing suicide rather than confronting the wrongs he believes his father has committed.

The play's second-to-last revelation, immediately preceding the final, which is Joe's suicide. It is important to note that the report of Larry's suicide, and then Joe's suicide, happen in quick succession. This spilling of blood, whether actual or symbolic, in large quantities at the end of a play is another characteristic of Greek tragic drama.

This news is horrific and devastates Joe, who always felt that, though he was responsible for the deaths of some pilots, he was not responsible for Larry's. Joe tells Annie, Kate, and Chris that, although he always thought he didn't kill his own son, he has now realized that all the boys, all the soldiers who died because of faulty parts, were "his sons." Joe says he is going upstairs to get ready to turn himself in in jail, while Kate screams at Chris for reading the letter, and says that Joe will not be able to survive in prison.

A key moment in the text. Joe recognizes that he has responsibilities to others in the world, not just to his family, and that, by allowing the planes to be fitted with defective parts, Joe ruined the lives of other men and other families—families with father and mothers and brothers, families just as important as the Keller clan is to him, and men who depended on him.

Chris tells his mother that, finally, the family is confronting the reality that they have obligations to others in the world, not just to themselves—that their responsibilities lies outside the immediate Keller family. Upstairs, a gunshot is heard, and Kate screams again, calling for Jim; Joe has shot himself out of grief. Chris is now doubly upset, for he tells his mother he didn't intend for Joe to kill himself—he simply wanted his father to know the truth. But as Annie stands on watching mutely, Kate tells Annie and Chris that now they ought to go away—that they must live as best they can, despite the horrors they have seen. The play ends.

The final act of violence in the play. What is perhaps most stunning about this scene is Kate's reaction—she almost expects that Joe is going to do this, and she is prepared to live her new life—one without her husband, without Larry—one in which Chris and Annie live far away. Kate seems to acknowledge that the guilt the family has hidden has festered for too long, and she, Kate, must remain alone with it, while Annie and Chris do what they can to escape.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Schlegel, Chris. "*All My Sons.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 3 Apr 2014. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Schlegel, Chris. "*All My Sons.*" LitCharts LLC, April 3, 2014. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/all-my-sons.

To cite any of the quotes from *All My Sons* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Miller, Arthur. All My Sons. Penguin. 2000.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Miller, Arthur. All My Sons. New York: Penguin. 2000.