

NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE
THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

FRI 6 - SAT 21
OCT 2017

ALL MY SONS

BY ARTHUR MILLER

INSIGHT PACK

Nottingham
Playhouse



INTRODUCTION

This pack supports Nottingham Playhouse's 2017 production of *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller, directed by Associate Director Fiona Buffini. The activities provided are specifically designed to support KS4-5 students, who are attending the performance at Nottingham Playhouse, or studying the play in school.

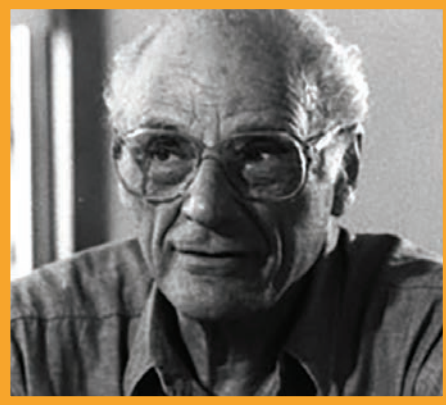
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Director Fiona Buffini in the rehearsal room with actors Sean Chapman and Caroline Loncq



ARTHUR MILLER AND TIMELINE OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS



Arthur Miller is regarded as one of the greatest dramatists of the 20th century.

Most of his work is set in the America of the day and portrays realistic characters and events. Miller was interested in how personal relationships dictate the way we lead our lives. He not only deals with political and moral issues but also weaves in ideas from Greek Tragedy. Miller is regarded as a man who has a complex and insightful understanding of the human condition and without his voice, the shape of American literature would have been very different.

17 OCTOBER 1915

Arthur Miller is born to a Jewish family in Harlem, New York.

1929

The stock market crash causes the family business to fail and prompted them to move to the then less fashionable Brooklyn. Now victims of the Depression, this time made a deep impression on Arthur, which resonates throughout his work.

1923

Now at the age of eight, his father emigrates from Poland, with Arthur's grandparents, to America. His father runs an extremely successful family business of manufacturing coats and suits. This is the epitome of the American Dream, the opportunity to rise from rags to riches. Arthur would later question this Dream in *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*.

1930

2,000 The U.S banks collapse.

1932

Arthur graduates from high school and undertakes manual labour in order to earn enough money to get to university. He delivers bread at 4am, drove a delivery van and worked in an auto parts warehouse.

1934

Arthur is accepted into the University of Michigan to study journalism. At the same time, the Spanish war is raging in Europe, (several of his friends go to fight and die), and there are also strikes and labour unrest in America. It is all this that contributes to him becoming much more politically active.

1936

He writes *No Villain* in just six days, his first play, and immediately switches to an English degree.

1938

Arthur graduates from University.

1939

Hitler invades Poland and the Second World War breaks out.

1940

Arthur marries his first wife.

1944

His first child, Jane is born. His play, *The Man Who Had All The Luck* is performed. It closes after just three days, despite winning the Theatre Guild National Award. It lost \$55,000 as well as all its investors! Oh the irony!

1945

Arthur decides, however, to have one last shot on writing for theatre, the result was *All My Sons*, which was a success and went onto win the New York Drama Critics Circle award.

1949

Death of a Salesman premieres and wins many awards and critical acclaim

1955

Arthur writes *A View from the Bridge*, inspired from his previous work in the Brooklyn shipyards. Whilst there, he hears a story of some men coming over to work from Italy illegally, their journey's over to America and their dreams being ripped away leaving many betrayed.

1956

Arthur divorces his first wife and then marries actress Marilyn Monroe.

1961

Arthur divorces Marilyn Monroe.

1962

Arthur marries photographer, Inge Morath.

2005 – Arthur dies aged 89.



THE DUST BOWL ERA

- **This happened in the 1930s following the stock market crash in 1929.**
- **A time when poverty swept the nation, unemployment reached 25% in 1931.**
- **A series of extreme dust storms and drought also badly affected agriculture and the economy.**
- **The dust storms, otherwise known as black blizzards, reached as far east as New York and Washington.**

WORLD WAR TWO

- **Hitler invaded Poland and the Second World War begins in 1939.**
- **In 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on the American military.**
The most devastating strike came at Pearl Harbour, the naval base where much of the US Pacific Fleet was moored. In a two-hour attack, Japanese warplanes sank, or damaged 18 warships and destroyed 164 aircrafts. Over 2,400 servicemen and civilians lost their lives.

“No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.” - President Franklin D. Roosevelt in response to this tragedy.

Roosevelt then began raising an armed force as part of America's war effort. That force had to be supplied with the weapons, equipment, uniforms, guns, tanks, ships and warplanes needed to fight. The war production effort brought immense changes to American life and millions of men and women entered the service, production grew and unemployment virtually disappeared. There was room for businesses to succeed again and money to be made with demand being so high. Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, makes his money this way.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

“The American Dream is the large unacknowledged screen in front of which all American writing plays itself out – the screen of the perfectibility of man. Whoever is writing in the United States is using the American Dream as an ironical pole of his story.” - Arthur Miller



After the Great Depression and the Second World War, a boom in employment and the economy had led people to find comfort in a consumer society. The new American Capitalist economic model was seen as a celebration and triumph of having risen from the horrors of the past few decades. By the 1950s the idea of the American Dream was so indoctrinated in the way people lived that people's worth could be amounted to their possessions. Individuals and families held the firm belief that hard work would equate to financial security and in turn this would lead to the idyllic white picket fenced life that everyone strived to achieve. This attitude was so prevalent in society that when people's hard work did not necessarily manifest into this perfect vision of life, people believed they had failed in an enormous way.



Moreover, because of the patriarchal world in mid-20th century America, fathers and eldest sons were responsible for going out to work and earning this idyllic lifestyle and providing this for his family. A loss of finical worth and social standing fell heavily on the man's shoulders and we see some of Arthur Miller's leading male characters (*All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*) are driven to suicide because they believed they have failed everyone in this way.

Look carefully at the real billboards from the time on this page.

HOW DID MILLER VIEW HIS WORLD?

Miller believed the Second World War together with the Civil War of the 19th century touched the lives of most Americans. Miller himself learned that it was possible suddenly to lose everything, a lesson later reinforced by the treatment of the Jews during the war.

When you know you can lose everything you have to decide what really matters in life and what is fundamental. In many of his plays, including *All My Sons*, Miller insists that human relationships and obligations are central. He believes that it is necessary to accept responsibility for your own life, your own actions, but also to accept that you live in the world and that, therefore, you are responsible for others.



ALL MY SONS

Where the Story Came From

The story of *All My Sons* has two origins, one historical and one literary. Arthur Miller's then mother-in-law drew his attention to an article in an Ohio newspaper, which described a young woman's decision to inform on her own father who had supplied faulty parts to the military. To this he added elements from *The Wild Duck*, a play by Henrik Ibsen, a writer who was to prove immensely influential throughout his career. A few years later he wrote *The Crucible* and *A View from a Bridge*, which were also about characters who became informants.

America in the 1950s, was in the grip of an anti-communist witch-hunt in which the strangely named House Un-American Activities Committee (A Committee of the House of Representatives) required people to inform on their friends for their supposed radical views and actions. Miller rejected this but betrayal remains a central theme in the play. Both betrayal within the family and betrayal of the moral values, without which there can be no functioning society. He also chose to write about fathers and sons, rather than retain the daughter from the original story, feeling that he knew more about this relationship. From Ibsen's play he derived the idea of two partners in a business, one of whom is made to take moral and legal responsibility on behalf of the other. More significantly, he learned from Ibsen the importance of the past that applies its pressure on the present.

**One of Miller's central concerns
"is how the chickens come home to roost."**

PAST PRODUCTIONS

Nearly all of the historic and past productions of *All My Sons* have had a hugely naturalistic set and feel about them, see images from two different productions below, which have very similar designs and concepts:



Apollo Theatre, 2010, directed by Howard Davies Starring David Suchet and Zoe Wanamaker



On Broadway, 2008, directed by Simon McBurney Starring Katie Holmes and Patrick Wilson

WHAT MAKES THIS PRODUCTION UNIQUE?

Modern Political Context:

Nottingham Playhouse's Associate Director, Fiona Buffini, chose to stage this play after Donald Trump was elected last year. Miller's play asks the audience to consider our responsibility to others and our moral rights within our world. The play challenges what it means to be human, the choices we make and the impact it has on others. In light of recent political upheaval, not just in the US but across the globe, the themes first presented in 1947 seem to ring true once more. *All My Sons* asks the question about what it means to be an American today, whilst the whole world watches and this production will provoke conversations and stimulate debate.

The Design

What makes this production so unique is its design - it is uncluttered and creates a vast and epic backdrop using the apple tree as the focus and central point. The set, unlike previous productions, is both naturalistic but also abstract – it does not feature a white picket fence!

The set provides a framework for the actors to inhabit the world of the play in a natural way. It beautifully details the idealistic American family life in their backyard in 1947 as well as creating a flip-side moral universe and impressive arena, in which we see the characters being torn to pieces by the truth. The tree with exposed roots ultimately symbolises that the truth is unearthed; the truth is revealed. This production plays with marrying real-life (naturalism) with Greek Tragedy (heightened) through this remarkable backdrop. The uncluttered set has provided a clean platform for Miller's exceptional language and story-telling to take centre stage in this modern production.



Image above: Model Box for *All My Sons* made by designer Dorrie Scott

INTERVIEWS WITH CAST AND CREATIVES

Dorrie Scott – Designer

Q What were you hoping to achieve with your design?

A The script describes the Keller's back garden in a lot of detail; it's specific about garden furniture, the trees, and the neighbouring houses - all of the suburban domestic clutter you'd expect on a TV set. Very early on in the design process, we decided that the spoken text is so powerful in itself that the clutter of the set actually distracted from the importance and strength of the words. We stripped it back leaving the four very significant elements; the house, the tree, a defined back garden and two pieces of furniture.

The storm that preludes Act One has caused the apple tree to crack, the apple tree is so significant in the play that I wanted this trigger to have a physical effect on the whole set, suddenly uprooting the world of these characters. The tree blown over in the storm has ripped up the family's secrets buried deep beneath the surface; the next 24 hours in which the truths are played out

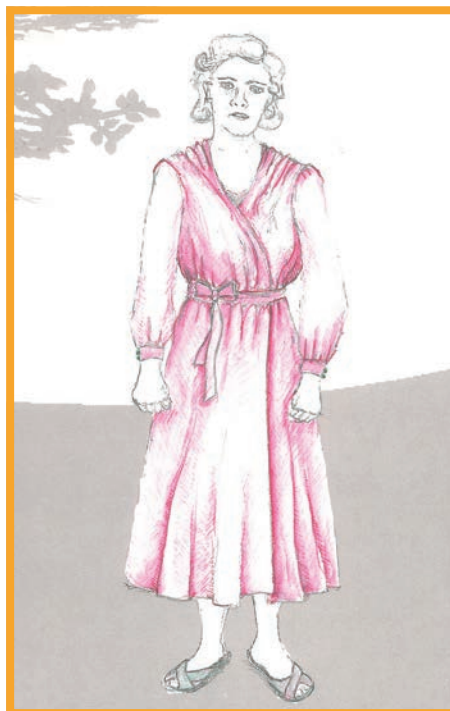
are on an exposed and fragmented set.

The apple tree remains overhanging the playing space depicting Larry, who is tied up in many aspects of the family's secrets, has a constant presence over the action.

Q Which costume is your favourite and why?

A As a collection of costumes Kate's are my favourite. We see her transition through many states throughout the play, seeing several sides to her character. Throughout the day and into the evening at times she is fragile yet defiant. She is a proud mother who is propping up the family, she is welcoming and supportive but stern, with a worried and restless current running beneath the surface. Over the three acts we see her in three separate costumes; day time relaxed, afternoon dressing gown, evening formal ready to go out and evening formal when it is broken down after the argument. Through these costumes we help paint more detail into the complexities of her character and situation.

Kate Keller's costumes



Q What was the biggest challenge you faced designing this production of *All My Sons*?

A Balancing the proportioning of space between the people, the house and the tree was challenging; the house needed to be present and fairly sizeable given the family's wealth, but it couldn't be too imposing on the back garden where all of the action takes place. Similarly, the apple tree needed to have a presence without reducing the playing space too much. We have moved the set into the upstage extension in order

to make the best use of the space, so that there is plenty of space around the action.

Q Is there anything else you think we should know?

A There is a lot of discussion about wealth and success of the family, which all becomes meaningless when their family unit begins to divide and crumble, there is an intended contrast between the dark monochrome colouring of the stage and the house as materialistic symbols of wealth and the realistic rich colouring of the characters and the tree.

Interview with Caroline Loncq as Kate Keller



Q What inspiration did you take for your portrayal of Kate?

A I have put a few characteristics of some women I know into the Kate 'bank', and I am the mother of a son myself, which has informed some of my thoughts about Kate. Mostly I have tried to dive into the wonderful layers that Arthur Miller has given the character and find the truth within Kate, and myself, and where those two might resonate with each other. Miller's writing is so great to work on as an actor: the inspiration is all on the page, the electricity within the exchanges, how everything changes with each new character that enters the yard (the garden). It feels like it's a process of unearthing the essential truths, rather than adding on top.

I see Kate as a woman who suffered two very intense traumas within a few months of each other, which significantly altered her relationship to her world. I don't think she has processed them at all - I think that she went into emotional lockdown as a way to keep herself, Joe and the family afloat. The play is full of little triggers that raise the stakes for Kate as they evoke her buried trauma. I've done work on trauma and PTSD which has been very valuable. I've also researched the period the play is set and tried to think about the world that Kate was born into and her journey through life up to the point the play begins.

Q What do you believe family means to Kate?

A The people in Kate's family: Joe, Chris and Larry, are everything to her, they are her world and she values her success as a mother, wife and home-maker. In some ways Miller is playing with the idea of the archetypal mother - he calls the character "Mother" even though everyone within the play calls her by her name, Kate. Her status as a mother gives her privilege, people have been treating her with kid gloves since Larry's disappearance, as you would a mother who has lost a child, and this has given her a degree of power and control over her world that she isn't prepared to relinquish.

I think Kate was a woman who, before World War II, recognised her own privilege and good fortune in having a husband who had built up a great business from nothing (with Steve, Ann's father) and two beautiful boys, Chris and Larry. At that point I think the whole block felt like her extended family, with her boundless love and empathy extending beyond her own walls to her neighbours and friends. Then the war came and her sons went away to fight and her sleepless nights began. Ultimately, her whole life started to unravel the day that Joe got a call in the early hours from Steve at the 'shop' (which is what they call the factory), and further disintegrated when Joe got arrested and collapsed when Larry went missing some months later. I think Kate, like any mother, will cling to any shred of hope that her son might be alive; she can't even hear any different as it is too much of a threat to the fragile status quo she has created.

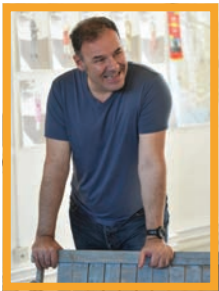
Q What have you enjoyed most about playing your character?

A It's not every day that you get to work on a play this good - or play a character that goes on such an epic emotional journey. It's not hard in this group of actors to be honest. Each character that comes on the stage brings something else to the party and with a cast this good, it feels like the stakes go up with each new person who arrives in the yard. I love the way Fiona works (the director), she makes us feel that we can do anything that's true, and that makes for a genuinely alive experience. Each time we return to a scene in rehearsal, it feels like we deepen our understanding of it, not that we go back or repeat anything, which is great. Every day brings new discoveries about Kate and what happens to the Kellers. My favourite theatre feels alive and truthful; it crackles. As I write this, we are at the stage of rehearsal where we are starting to run the acts and glimpse the whole arc of the play - I have total faith in Fiona to conduct the whole symphony, as it were, so I can just concentrate on Kate's journey. It's a big old emotional journey for Kate, but I'm super eager to get back on the



rollercoaster each time and you can't ask for more than that. It will be amazing to take an audience on this journey with us and I can't wait to feel how the Nottingham audience responds to this story. It's a very exciting project, truly, and I'm proud to be part of it.

Interview with Sean Chapman as Joe Keller



Q How did you approach preparing for this role?

A Research was key. The most important thing for me to understand is that Joe would have grown up in the Dust Bowl period, so he was a young man at the time

that there was searing poverty throughout the Midwest of America shortly after the big financial Stock Market crash. He would have grown up in a time when people lived in what were called dirt shacks, which were wooden timber houses with dirt floors (that's where the phrase dirt poor comes from). So for those people they lived in a society where there was no protection, no welfare state, there's the beginnings of major unionisation but even that was a very corrupt process, so he grew up in the knowledge that if he didn't provide, or if his father didn't provide for him and for his family then they would starve; and they did starve. For him the fact that he's built a

factory, and he's provided things for his family to live comfortably and well, means that in his own eyes he's doing all and everything that he could do. But he's living now in a post-war condition, where people are beginning to question how that wealth was built up. However, in Joe's own understanding of his place in the world, protecting your family, looking after it and sustaining it were the only important things to do. Arthur Miller's making the point throughout the play that there is a bigger family we have to think of, which is the family of the world but for a man like Joe, I'm really sympathetic to the fact that's something of a mystery; he's grown up where nobody supports you if you don't look after yourself.

Preparing to play him is about getting my head into Joe's position and the character's background, which influences his decisions throughout his life. He feels undermined when anyone challenges the way he lived, or the way he is now. He says very tellingly about his own son, 'I should have put him out when

he was ten, like I was put out, and made to earn his keep. Then he'd know how a buck is made in this world.' So from the age of ten Joe would have been working long days in the Midwestern sun probably without much food or drink, there was no pampering. So he's coming from a point of a view, which is enormously focused and when you step on stage as Joe Keller at the beginning of the play you have to bring all this along with you.

Q How do you think has Joe dealt with his guilt?

A He doesn't have any... well not until the final moments. In exploring the play as actors in the rehearsal room, we've been able to luxuriate in who knows what, what they really know and what they think they know. When it comes to Joe processing what happened, his description of it is very telling, 'it was a moment in time; it was a single moment'. Miller's making the point that we all make sudden instant mistakes but the morality of it is what you do afterwards. In the heat of the moment Joe says, 'What could I do! I'm in business....A hundred and twenty cracked, you're out of business....You don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good, they close you up, they tear your contracts....You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away?'

We've just been rehearsing the scene now, where Joe says, and I've got no reason to disbelieve him, 'I never thought they'd install them. I swear to God. I thought they'd stop 'em before anybody took off... By the time they could spot them I thought I'd have the process going again.' So what he has is a moment in time, which he then spends the next three and a half years suffering for because other people won't let it go. Joe really doesn't feel guilt, he doesn't think he's done anything overtly wrong and I think physiologically it's fascinating because if you tell yourself that often enough, it's one of those lies you start to believe. I think for Joe, and what Miller is exploring, is the physiological tension that is created by holding onto some form of differed, or blurred truth

telling but that we can all be caught out by that. In the final beats of the play, I think Miller's cleverness is that he doesn't make Joe feel truly guilty. Instead of pure guilt, what Joe sees is a new better vision evident in that wonderful moment when he says to his own son, 'Sure he [Larry] was my son but I think to him they were all my sons.' In these last moments Joe glimpses and understands finally the way Larry viewed the world and his father's place within this; Joe sees that he is everyone's father, just as everyone is his son, he has a larger responsibility. There is then now no way he can deal with this guilt, there's no way a man of his stature and energy is going to do another twenty years in prison, so he takes his life.

Q What do you consider the biggest challenges have been in conveying Joe's journey in this production?

A I think that the journey itself comes to a crisis point in a particular scene with his son, Chris. Joe suddenly realises that Chris' view of him has changed forever and can't be brought back, his son's disgust at what his father has done means that there will always be a chasm between them. That particular scene is a catalyst and from then on in he stops negotiating with his son from a position of authority. In the last act you see them beginning to ensure there is a future for the family for what Joe has provided, even if he's not going to be in it. He wants his son to have the factory; he wants Chris to be married. There's this kind of subliminal genetic human thing that we must pass on the family goods.

In this period, there was a very expansive sense of American economics and there was the idea that as a father you owe your children their best chance to live, or continue living the American Dream. In terms of the biggest challenge that Joe faces, it is that growing awareness that nobody around him will let this issue go. He has to finally acknowledge that they're seeing something he doesn't see, something Larry saw before he committed suicide and this journey, this realisation, is hard but of extraordinary importance to convey.

Cary Crankson as Chris Keller



Q What do you believe family means to Chris?

A I think family is very important to Chris and I feel like he's made a lot of sacrifices for his family, especially where we find him in the play. He's come back

to a family that is in trouble and he has made himself available to this family and I think that he's set aside his own problems and thoughts of the war as well as his own dreams. Chris feels he has to be strong and to try and be some kind of a support for his mum. He's the last son and so he feels he has to be the son that counts and, therefore, that pressure has meant he hasn't been able to be his own man.

Q How do you think Chris felt as he was growing up with his brother?

A We've spoken a lot about who is the older brother and who is the younger brother. It said in the play quite often how much of a great guy Larry was and I feel like he was the more loved and favoured one. We came to the conclusion that Chris is the older brother. I have witnessed a lot of brothers' relationships and see so often how the younger brother can be more confident because they are copying the older one. They have this older brother as protection too and so they can kind of be this charismatic, gregarious kind of person because they are used to being with somebody older and there is safety in that. It's hard to adapt as the older child, getting all the attention until a new baby comes along and suddenly the baby's walking faster than you did, he's talking quicker than you did, so that's got to hurt. I thought about different sets of brothers I know, there are two brothers in particular that came to mind, where tragically the younger one died. In their case, the younger brother was great and free because he had not only his older brother but all his older brother's friends around him too, he looked up to all of

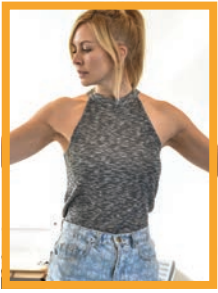
us and he was kind of all our younger brother. I try to imagine myself as that older brother and I imagine how it must be to lose that.

I feel there is some kind of jealousy between Chris and Larry as they grow older. Larry has their father's respect, he's got Ann, his beautiful sweetheart, and they talk a lot about Larry playing baseball but Chris playing golf. Larry is the all American sports guy. I think it's unfair to say their parents loved, or showed more attention to Larry, it is subtler than that because Chris does still have a great relationship with his father and his mother but you can just feel, especially from the father, that Larry's qualities are just slightly more admired. Having said all that, I think there is also a deep love there too.

Q What decisions did you make about Chris' backstory with Ann, do you think he always loved her?

A There's a lot of things that I'm leaving open to be decided as we proceed in rehearsal but at the moment I'm playing with a particular idea. In my last answer, I detailed two brothers I knew, one of which had died. I observed that the elder brother started to take on a lot of the qualities of the younger brother. There was something about him now, there was some part of his brother that was embodied in him. Even some of the girls they knew now found him attractive. So I don't know if Chris has always been in love with Ann. He's certainly always admired her, she's always been the beautiful girl and I think there was probably some jealousy over her between Larry and Chris when they were younger. The feeling I get is that it's a realisation that he's in love with her. I imagine, one of his main preoccupations while he is away becomes her and that's why they write so many letters to each other. The more you think about the idea of a person, it all mixes up in his ideas of a person, a family and a future.

Eva-Jane Willis as Ann Deever



Q Have you found it challenging to portray the conflict and compromises Ann faces?

A Arthur Miller certainly gives us a challenge. Every single character in the play starts with what seems

to be a very black and white morality about what they believe is the truth and also what they believe is important. Then, by the end of the play, each and every character has learned something new, which has forced them to completely alter their view of the world.

With Ann, she and Chris have a very similar steadfast moral compass at the beginning of the play and they both seem like the type who would never compromise on that morality, on what is good and true and right. So it's certainly challenging but what Arthur Miller does brilliantly is that it doesn't happen all in one go. It happens with these little dominos that he just puts in with each word, with each page, each scene, these little things get set up one by one, so that there comes a point where the whole thing just knocks over and suddenly you find yourself completely compromised and it takes everyone by surprise. And there's no time in the play, these characters are forced to make incredibly quick decisions and suddenly you find yourself completely on the other side of what you thought was right. So, it's challenging but also I think the writing is so generous and so brilliantly done that you almost don't have to act it, you just have to think and feel and say the words, so it's a gift really.

Q Why do you think Ann came back after all these years?

A Well the text tells us that she probably would have come back sooner if she thought that Chris has wanted her to. It seems those years have been about a very slow, gradual testing I suppose of whether or not enough time has passed to be able to go back to a place that's very painful and potentially marry someone new; to be able to start with a new happy love that isn't completely shrouded by grief. I also think that ultimately, it's a time when women had been told, as we are kind of still told a lot of the time today, that one of the best things you can do is get yourself hitched. Ann

lost her sweetheart, her father's in prison and she's moved away to New York out of shame. The only other man in her life really is Chris. She had to move away from the town, she's in this brand new city all by herself, she's living in a place with her mum and brother and probably not having encountered that many more new romances. Although, the text does say that she did almost get married but I suppose there's nothing quite like your childhood sweetheart and that's the American Dream, this idea that you marry your next door neighbour. I think because they have a shared grief [Chris and Ann] anyone new that she meets isn't going to fully understand what she's been through and who can understand it better than Chris, who has lost his brother and also went to war himself. So I think there are two things she came back for, firstly love but also to see through that childhood dream that she can't let go of. The dream that she will get her childhood sweetheart and she will have the white picket fence and the babies and that whole package, all of which is very important, especially at that time and to a girl like her.

Q Do you think you share any similarities with Ann?

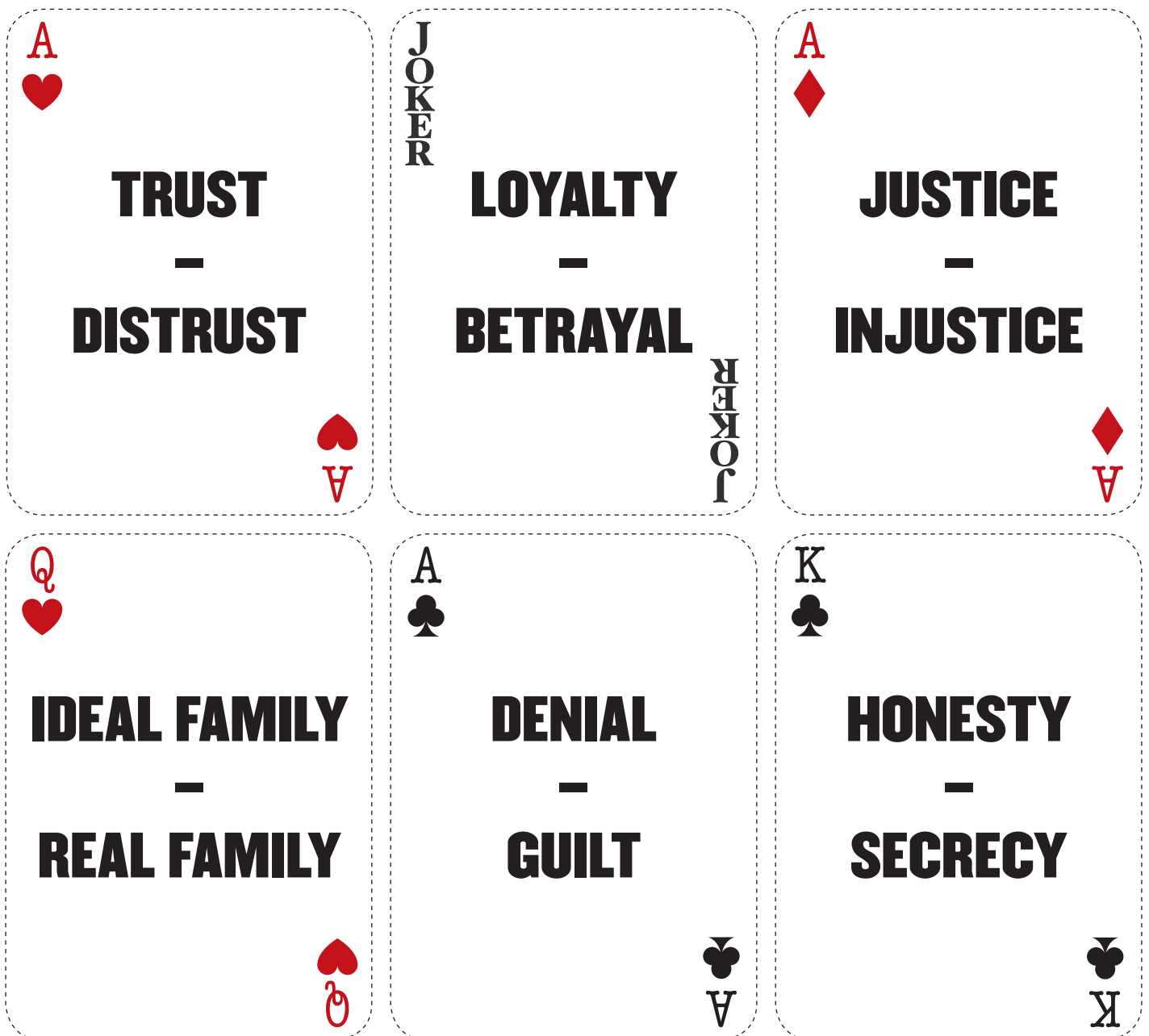
A I definitely share her romantic idea of love. I absolutely understand her compromise at the end because she talks a lot about having felt alone for those three years that she was away. It comes to the point that she says, 'I've been so lonely Kate...I can't leave here alone again' and I completely relate to that because I think in our generation, in this world, I feel like we're a lot of lonely people who use social media etc. as a way to feel connected but they didn't have that then, they didn't have anything, they had letters. She and Chris were writing letters to each other for two years. And so I can completely understand why she's got this burning passion in her heart, which ultimately leads her to hand over what she thought was true and just and right for what she wants in the end, which is her true love and that's something I can absolutely relate to. Getting married and having a family become very real and, as much as we've evolved, these things are still very much considerations for women of a certain age and so I don't find it very difficult to relate to her at all.

ACTIVITIES SECTION

In the rehearsal process the director Fiona Buffini creates a safe space for actors to be playful and unlock the language of the characters to understand their relationships and organically find a way to feel their way through the story. She encourages the company to work together as an ensemble and the most important thing is to get the text on its feet for an actor to really understand what is going on in the character's head. The following exercises will help you explore the themes, characters and practical approaches to unlock the text in an accessible way and a manner very similar to our own rehearsal room.

The Themes - *All My Sons* is about a family.

The following are a few of the most obvious and important themes that come to light:



Cut out and distribute the above playing cards. Then in pairs count to 10 and create a still image that represents each theme in the 10 second count down, then slowly move into another image expressing the opposite theme. You may also want to bring these themes to life using dialogue and movement.

Discuss: What do you notice about creating these images?

How do they change and what stories and characters did you develop to tell your story?

A 3D WORLD

It is important for the actors first of all to understand the characters facts and their connections with each other. This exercise introduces the characters in a practical way.

In small groups, using the character facts below, select a character in your group and discuss what we know about the character you have selected. Invite one person from each group to become moulded (like a piece of clay) by the other members in the group to explore and create your own representation of your chosen character. Each group will then present their character back to the rest of the class and decide where each character should be in relation to the other at the start and then at the end of the play.

Character Facts:



Joe Keller is not a very bad man. He loves his family but does not see the universal human "family", which has a higher claim on his duty. He may think he has got away with his crime but is troubled by the thought of it. He relies on his wife, Kate, not to betray his past errors.

Chris Keller has been changed by his experience of war, where he has seen men laying down their lives for their friends. He is angry that the world has not been changed, that the selflessness of his fellow soldiers counts for

nothing. He feels guilty to make money out of a business that does not value the men on whose labour it relies.

Kate Keller is a woman of enormous maternal love, which extends to her neighbours' children, notably George. Despite her instinctive warmth, she is capable of supporting Joe in his deceit. To believe Larry is dead would, for her, be to believe his death was a punishment of Joe's crime. So she must persuade herself that Larry still lives. Joe sees this idea to be ridiculous, but must tolerate it to secure Kate's support for his own deception.



Ann Deever shares Chris's high ideals but believes he should not feel ashamed by his wealth. She disowns her father whom she believes to be guilty. She has no wish to hurt Kate but will show her Larry's letter if she (Kate) remains opposed to Ann's marrying Chris.



George Deever is an old friend of Chris. When younger, he greatly admired him. In the war, like Chris, he has been decorated for bravery. He follows Chris in accepting that Steve is guilty. Now he reproaches Chris for, as he sees it, deceiving him. He is bitter because he has grown cynical about the ideals for which he sacrificed his own opportunities for happiness.

IMAGINATION AND IMPROVISATION

In rehearsals the actors work on developing backstories for their characters to question and deepen their understanding of their character's motives in the present. It is important for actors to play with ideas of possibilities and explore potential reasons why their characters would act as they do to uncover an intention or objective that drives them. Some discoveries come from imagining and improvising those scenes that we do not witness but which are referred to in the play. Visualise the following scenarios:

'Three and a half years before the events of the play, Larry Keller was reported missing in action, while flying a mission off the coast of China. His father, Joe Keller, was head of a business, which made aero engine parts. When, one night, the production line began to turn out cracked cylinder heads, the night foreman alerted Joe's deputy manager, Steve Deever as he arrived at work. Steve telephoned Joe at home, to ask what to do. Worried by the lost production and not seeing the consequences of his decision, Joe told Steve to weld over the cracks. He said that he would take responsibility for this but could not come in to work as he had the flu. Several weeks' later twenty-one aeroplanes crashed on the same day, killing the pilots.'

Activity: In pairs, improvise the moment in which Joe and Steve hear of the tragic news of the pilot's death. Using a newspaper as a prop (Arthur Miller likes to provide his characters with these types of props) play with how the scene develops and the heated conversation between Joe and Steve as they discuss what to do next.

DISCUSS: Who holds the power in the scene? What discoveries were made? How does practically working with this backstory help your understanding of Joe's character?

'The Investigation revealed the fault in the cylinder heads and Steve and Joe were arrested and convicted. During their appeal, Joe denied Steve's (true) version of events and he managed to convince the court he knew nothing of what had happened. Joe was then released from prison.'

Activity: Thought-track / hot-seat Joe and Steve separately about their feelings towards each other after the jury's verdict.

DISCUSS: How does this change the relationship between Joe and Steve?

'Before his last flight, Larry wrote to his fiancée, Ann, Steve's daughter. He had read of his father's and Steve's arrest. Now he was planning suicide. Three and a half years later, Ann has told no-one of this letter. Kate Keller knows her husband to be guilty of the deaths of the pilots and has convinced herself that Larry is alive. She will not believe him to be dead and expects Larry to return and keeps his room exactly as it was when he left home. She supports Joe's deception. In return she demands his support for her hope that Larry will come back. Ann and her brother, George, have disowned their father, believing him guilty. But George has gone at last to visit his father in jail and Steve has persuaded him of the true course of events.'

Activity: Improvise the scene between George and his father in jail. Think about what in particular Steve says to his son that sways his mind and eventually convinces him to believe his story. How does Chris react and what does he want to do next?

DISCUSS: What emotions are present in this scene and how easy/hard is it to portray these? Why do you think Arthur Miller decided not to write this scene into the play? How does the playwright make use of past events having consequences in the present?

BRINGING A SCENE TO LIFE

Director, Fiona Buffini explains that everything you need to know is in the text; her advice is to always get the play on its feet in order to unlock and be playful with the language. This helps ensure the story is truly understandable and brings the characters to life.

With this in mind, look at the extract provided between Kate and Joe Keller below:

Edited Scene Kate & Joe Act 1

[CHRIS exits into the house. Her smile vanishes]

KATE Why did he invite her here?

JOE Why does that bother you?

KATE She's been in New York three and a half years, why all of a sudden - ?

JOE Well, maybe - maybe he just wanted to see her.

KATE Nobody comes seven hundred miles 'just to see'.

JOE What do you mean? He lived next door to the girl all his life, why shouldn't he want to see her again? Don't look at me like that, he didn't tell me any more than he told you.

KATE He's not going to marry her.

JOE How do you know he's even thinking about it?

KATE It's got that about it.

JOE Well? So what?

KATE What's going on here Joe?

JOE Now listen, kid...

KATE *[avoiding contact with him]* She's not his girl, Joe. She knows she's not.

JOE You can't read her mind.

KATE Then why is she still single? New York is full of men, why isn't she married? Probably a hundred people told her she's foolish, but she's waited.

JOE How do you know why she waited?

KATE She knows what I know, that's why. She's faithful as a rock. In my worst moments, I think of her waiting, and I know again that I'm right.

JOE Look, it's a nice day. What are we arguing for?

KATE Nobody in this house dast take her faith away, Joe. Strangers might. But not his father, not his brother.

JOE *[exasperated]* What do you want me to do? What do you want?

KATE I want you to act like he's coming back. Both of you. Don't think I haven't noticed you since Chris invited her. I won't stand for any nonsense.

JOE But, Kate -

KATE Because if he's not coming back, then I'll kill myself! Laugh. Laugh at me. But why did that happen the very night she came back? She goes to sleep in his room and his memorial breaks in pieces. Look at it. Look. Joe...

JOE Calm yourself.

KATE Believe with me, Joe. I can't stand all alone.

JOE Calm yourself.

KATE Only last week a man turned up in Detroit, missing longer than Larry. You read it yourself.

JOE All right, all right, calm yourself.

KATE You above all have got to believe, you -

JOE Why me above all?

KATE Just don't stop believing.

JOE What does that mean, me above all?

Now turn the page and apply the following approaches to help explore the text practically.

Approaches

- 1.** Read the scene back to back – to get the words off the page and listen to your co-actors.
- 2.** Whisper the scene, shoulder to shoulder – to build tension. Consider this scene is taking place outside their house where Chris and Ann have just entered and you don't want them to overhear their conversation.
- 3.** Decide on one of the following objectives for your character to play with as your intention in the scene. To convince, embarrass, insult, provoke or plead.
- 4.** Moving with the text – Joe is in a rush and doesn't want to have this conversation with Kate again, Joe's intention is to move away from Kate. Kate's intention is to stop Joe, by blocking him not physically but she must move to face Joe and try and get his attention. At a moment that feels right, Joe must stop and turn to face Kate, explore what happens to the scene after this happens.

DISCUSS: What do Kate and Joe want from each other? Everything said has an effect on the other person; why are they behaving in this way?

DISCUSS: What do you notice about playing with different approaches to the text in this way? Does it give you a deeper insight into the relationship between Kate and Joe?

Have you discovered anything interesting through these exercises? What line did Joe turn around on and why?



Actors Sean Chapman and Caroline Loncq rehearsing.

WRITING A LETTER TO ANN

The love story between Ann and Chris is created through letters, which span over two years. Write what you think Chris would send to Ann whilst he was away at war. Choose either to write:

- Just after Larry's death when the letters between them began.
- Or... towards the end of this two year period, just before Ann comes to visit the Keller's.

Dear Ann,



SYMPATHY CHAIR

The end of the play opens a point for discussion about the tragic circumstances surrounding Joe's suicide. To reflect on the play, discuss these challenging issues in a safe space and explore your own empathy with the characters on a personal level. Place four chairs in the corners of the room, with a character name placed on each chair and stand nearest the chair/character they have the most sympathy with at the end of the play.

DISCUSS: Why have you chosen that character to stand by?

Be a Theatre Critic: Write a review of the production

Write a review of Fiona Buffini's production. Consider the acting, set, costume, lighting and sound. How clear was the story? What relevance does the play have today, 65 years after it was written?

Be a Set-designer: Designing your own production of ALL MY SONS

Once a play is chosen, the next job for the director is to pull a creative team together. This includes a Set Designer who will work closely with the director to generate ideas for the production. Imagine you are on your way to meet with a director, who will be waiting to see the sketches of ideas you have for a production of *All My Sons*. Think about whether you want this to be abstract, or naturalistic, in a conventional theatre space with proscenium arch, or maybe even in the round and why.

HAVE A DEBATE: FINAL DISCUSSION TOPICS

These can be discussed as a whole class or in small groups:

- Whose tragedy do you think it is? (Larry, Joe, Kate or Chris).
Tip: Divide the whole group into four smaller groups, each has to represent a character to defend and try to argue why it is their character's tragedy more than the other characters.
- Does Kate refuse to acknowledge Larry's death? If so, why?
Tip: See back to Cast Interviews section and look for Caroline's interview.
- What do you think the character of George Deever represents?
- Why does Ann return home?
Tip: See back to Cast Interviews section and look for Eva's interview.
- What does Joe mean by saying "...they were all my sons"? Why is this phrase the play's title?
Tip: Look at Sean's interview in the interviews section.
- Why do you think Joe decides to shoot himself?
Tip: Look at Sean's interview in the interviews section.

RESOURCES AND USEFUL LINKS:

For Arthur Miller's biography, works and social context:

<http://www.umich.edu/~amfiles/works.html>

Conversations with Arthur Miller, by Matthew Charles Roudané; 1987

The American Dream:

<http://america.day-dreamer.de/dream.htm>

The Statue of Liberty:

-Resource-THE-POETRY-SCHOOL.pdf

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