

DIGITAL THEATRE+

LESSON PLAN FOR REMOTE LEARNING
ENGLISH



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ALL MY SONS

BY ARTHUR MILLER

LESSON PLAN LENGTH: 60 MINUTES

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Consider their own responses (as audience members) to the characters in *All My Sons*
- Make connections between Arthur Miller's intentions in writing the play, with specific reference to disappointment
- Consider the genre of the play and the influence of Greek tragedy
- Use social, cultural and historical context to analyse characters within the play
- Develop critical analysis and creative choices as a result of these considerations

To teach this lesson, you will need the following resources:

- [A Guide to Theatre Design](#)
- [All My Sons | Stanhope Productions](#)
- [On Directing: Bruce Guthrie](#)
- [Lyn Gardner on Theatre and Performance: The Greeks](#)

Plus:

- Paper and a pen

Further viewing and reading (from Digital Theatre+ for extension activities):

- [All My Sons Study Guide](#)
- [Arthur Miller BBC Studios Documentary](#)
- [On Costume: Faye Michel](#)

**Keeping students and teachers safe during remote education is essential. Please ensure any online platform you are using to communicate or coordinate with students is suitable for their age group and check privacy settings. For further information, see the [NSPCC guidance](#).*

For further resources to help you teach *All My Sons*, including our [full-length production](#) and [Study Guide](#), visit www.digitaltheatreplus.com

EXERCISE 1

WHAT DO THEY LEARN?

- Pose the following statement by Arthur Miller to students from the [BBC documentary](#) about him:

"Most things end badly. Most human enterprise disappoints. But in the interval between inactivity and that disappointment – between starting something and realising that it is in vain – we accomplish a great deal."

- Assign different characters (including minor characters) to students (which can be done in discussion or as a written task), and ask them to create a set of responses to the following questions:
 - What does each character learn and/or accomplish during the play?
 - What disappointments does each character suffer? Some of these occur during the action of the play, and some are revealed from elsewhere in their lives.
 - To what extent do you feel sympathy for the character you have been assigned?
- Once all of these responses have been collated (either through online discussion or in written form, possibly on a shared document), each student should write or improvise a short speech (lasting up to two minutes) about the character they have the most sympathy for in the play. These can be submitted electronically to you or provided during an online lesson.



ESTIMATED TIME:

20 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to understand the level of complexity of the characters within the play, including the minor characters such as the neighbours, all of whom have made various assumptions and judgments about the secrets and tensions held within the family.

Students will develop an understanding of Arthur Miller's intentions for writing the play and begin to appreciate the nuances of tragedy and character.

EXERCISE 2

FACTS, QUESTIONS AND CHOICES



ESTIMATED TIME:
30 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to develop depth of knowledge and understanding of the individual characters in the play, and the wider world context, in order to make creative and/or analytical decisions. This task can be adapted, with minor characters being allocated to less able students, if and where appropriate.

- Watch [On Directing: Bruce Guthrie](#), specifically the chapters entitled **Staging *All My Sons***, **Preparing the World of *All My Sons*** and **Characterisation**. Bruce Guthrie explains a number of different tasks that he completed in preparation for working on the production to develop his understanding of the characters.
- Ask students to create a timeline of world events that influenced the play at the time it was written and then place the events of the play alongside it (this will help develop an understanding of characters' motivations and experiences, which influence later behaviour in the play.)
- This can be a collaborative task during an online teaching session, or an assignment that is submitted to you electronically, depending on students' prior knowledge and learning circumstances.

Tip: students can use the chapter on the **Playwright** in the [All My Sons Study Guide](#) for information on key events in 1946.

Extension tasks:

These activities could lead to written responses as extension tasks or additional lessons (this task can be adapted based on outcome):

- Students should create a written response to the question, "How do world events impact the lives of the individuals depicted in *All My Sons*?"
- They should consider how war impacts every individual, regardless of whether they saw military action or stayed at home, using the following questions as inspiration:
 - How does the war fracture or solidify relationships in the play?
 - What is the impact of grief and uncertainty?
 - Is trust impossible?
 - Is betrayal inevitable?

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EXERCISE 3

IS TRAGEDY INEVITABLE?

- Ask students to suggest adjectives to define the character of Joe Keller (you may wish to read pp. 8-13 of the [All My Sons Study Guide](#) to prepare questions to challenge and extend students' answers in this section.)
- Then watch the chapter of [On Directing: Bruce Guthrie](#) entitled **The Letter**.
- For students who are aware of the Greek tragedy form, ask them to define how the ending of the play conforms to Greek tragedy conventions and how Arthur Miller may have altered some of the convention (for example, rather than a king, we see the downfall of the common man).
- For those who are not yet familiar with the conventions, you can set them the task of reading [Lyn Gardner on Theatre and Performance: The Greeks](#).
- Create a debate (this can be done in an online teaching session, a thread of responses in a shared document, or in written form as appropriate):
 - Was any other outcome possible in this play?
 - What are our attitudes towards Ann at the end of the play? Students should bear in mind her previous suffering and the various justifications of why she brings, and reveals the letter.
 - What happens next? If you were to write a sequel to the play, what would it include? Consider all of the characters in the play, even the ones you might consider 'minor'. Miller has included them for a reason...
- All students should take notes during this debate if it is an online discussion. If it is set as an independent learning task, students can create a mind map or write bullet points to record their thoughts and submit them electronically.



ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is to use previous learning (through timelines, design etc.) to focus on the ending of the play. Students should refer back to the disappointments and learnings that we see within the play (Exercise 1) and use that to support their responses.

EXTRA TASKS

- Using pages 8-13 of the [All My Sons Study Guide](#) by Philip Breen, ask students to read and collate notes about Joe Keller.
- Bruce Guthrie describes him in the chapter entitled **Characterisation** of his interview [On Directing: Bruce Guthrie](#) as “the most complete character”.
- You may choose to challenge students to answer the questions in this section in order to develop their personal responses to the character.

The estimated time required for these extension tasks can be set according to your knowledge of your specific students.

These tasks continue the activities within this lesson plan and are designed to support longer periods of independent work, as required.

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