Senior Cycle English

Exploring Senior Cycle Texts
All My Sons by Arthur Miller

All My Sons by Arthur Miller is a drama included on the List of Prescribed Texts for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2028. It may be studied as part of the comparative study at Ordinary or Higher Level.

Image courtesy of Penguin

Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *All My Sons* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.

Scan the QR code or click here to access a Getting Started with Guide for this Text

Before you read (Teacher Guidance)

These activities encourage students to explore ideas of responsibility, family loyalty and moral decision-making while developing an understanding of the social and historical context of post-war America. Adapt as appropriate for your class.

1. Exploring Responsibility and Consequences

Facilitate a class discussion on personal responsibility and accountability. Invite students to consider situations where an individual's actions have consequences for others. Use a collaborative tool (e.g. Spiderweb discussion) to gather responses. Guide students in identifying different types of responsibility, including personal, family and societal responsibility.

2. Family Loyalty vs Moral Duty

Present students with a series of ethical dilemmas involving loyalty, honesty and responsibility. For example, should a person protect a family member who has done something wrong, or reveal the truth? Encourage discussion through Think-Pair-Share, debate or ranking activities. Prompt students to justify their decisions and consider alternative viewpoints.

3. Considering Historical Context

Support students in researching post-war America, the American Dream and the impact of World War II on families and communities. Encourage students to present findings through a collaborative digital timeline, infographic or shared class space. Use this activity to establish historical and social context for the play.

Extract

Background: This extract is taken from Act 3 of All My Sons. Chris Keller has discovered that his father knowingly allowed defective aircraft parts to be shipped during World War II. As Chris confronts Joe, tensions rise and long hidden truths emerge, forcing both characters to confront difficult questions about responsibility, family loyalty and morality.

Keller: (their movements are those of subtle pursuit and escape. Keller keeps a step out of Chris's range as he talks: You're a boy, what could I do! I'm in business, a man is in business. A hundred and twenty cracked, you're out of business. You got a process, the process don't work you're out of business. You don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good, they close you up, they tear up your contracts. What the hell's it to them? 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? (his voice cracking) I never though they'd install them. I swear to Got. I thought they'd stop 'em before anybody took off.

Chris: Then why'd you ship them out?
Keller: By the time they could spot them I thought I'd have the process going again, and I could show them they needed me and they'd let it go by. But weeks passed and I got no kick-back, so I was going to tell them.
Chris: Then why didn't you tell them?

Keller: it was too late. The paper, it was all over the front page, twenty one went down, it was too late. They came with handcuffs into the shop, what could I do? (He sits on bench) Chris... Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I'm sixty one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty one years old you don't get another chance, do ya?

Chris: You even knew that they wouldn't hold up in the air.
Keller: I didn't say that.
Chris: But you were going to warn them not to use them....
Keller: But that doesn't mean...
Chris: It means you knew they'd crash.
Keller: It don't mean that.
Chris: Then you thought they'd crash.
Keller: I was afraid maybe...
Chris: You were afraid maybe! God in heaven, what kind of a man are you? Kids were hanging in the air
by those heads. You knew that!
Keller: For you, a business for you!

Chris: (with burning fury) For me! Where do you live, where have you come from? For me! ...I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the Goddam business? Is that as far as your mind can see, the business? What is that, the world of business? What the hell do you mean, you did it for me? Don't you have a country? Don't you live in the world? What the hell are you? You're not even an animal, no animal kills his own, what are you? What must I do to you? I ought to tear the tongue out of your mouth, what must I do? (With his fist he pounds down upon his father's shoulder. He stumbles away, covering his face as he weeps) What must I do, Jesus God, what must I do?
Keller: Chris... My Chris...

Arthur Miller, 1947, *All My Sons*. London: Penguin Books (Act 3)

Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidance)

The following may be completed in written or oral format, as individuals or as part of a group activity.

1. Exploring Characterisation

Guide students in examining how Miller presents Joe and Chris Keller in the extract. You may wish to prompt attention to dialogue, stage directions and emotional responses. Encourage students to consider how the contrasting values of both characters shape the conflict and influence audience sympathy.

2. Exploring Themes

Facilitate a discussion identifying the key themes emerging from the extract. Support students in selecting relevant textual evidence to explore how Miller presents ideas relating to responsibility, family loyalty, guilt and moral accountability.

3. Personal Response Writing

Invite students to write a diary entry from the perspective of either Joe or Chris immediately following the confrontation. Encourage students to reflect on the events of the extract while considering the character's emotions, motivations and sense of responsibility. You may wish to guide students in attending to tone, structure and expressive language in shaping their response.

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

The following activities may draw on the extract provided or be used to support students' extended study of the play.

Click here

1. Performance and Interpretation

Invite students to view the trailer for the National Theatre production of All My Sons. Encourage students to consider how staging, lighting, music and actor delivery shape audience expectations. Students may write a short review evaluating the trailer's effectiveness in introducing the play's characters, themes and conflicts, supporting their response with specific examples from the trailer.

2. Writing Beyond the Ending

Encourage students to imagine events after the conclusion of the play. Students may compose a diary entry, letter or newspaper article exploring the impact of the events on the remaining characters.

3. Creating a Soundtrack

Guide students to select music that reflects the mood, themes or relationships presented in the play. Students may accompany their choices with a written commentary explaining how each selection connects to the text.

4. Designing a Memorial

Facilitate students in designing a memorial dedicated to the twenty-one pilots who lost their lives as a result of the defective cylinder heads. Encourage consideration of symbolism, imagery and quotations that reflect the themes of responsibility, loss and accountability. Students may accompany their design with a short written rationale explaining their choices.

5. Speech Writing

Support students in composing a speech in which Chris Keller addresses a group of young people about responsibility and moral courage. Students may draw on events from the play to support the ideas presented.