**Step III - Historical Background**

**Part A - Complete the following sentences according to the articles you have read:**

What was life like in the USA during the Great Depression, when Joe Keller was a young adult? Answer the following questions according to the passage:

1. What role did the radio play in American people’s lives during the Great Depression? (Answer in 3-4 sentences)
2. When people remember “the good old days”, they do not always remember them exactly as they were. Write a list of about 15 adjectives (“description” words) that are used in the article to describe life then.

**Part B: The Great Depression**

Answer the following question in at least 150 words: What was life like in the USA during the Great Depression, when Joe Keller was a young adult?

**Translate into Hebrew:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **English** | **Hebrew** | **English** | **Hebrew Hebrew** |
| Great Depression |  | to calm |  |
| inward |  | economic |  |
| hearth |  | support |  |
| chores |  | relief |  |
| fireside chats |  | stimulate |  |
| informal |  | recovery |  |
| inaugural address |  | campaign speech |  |

An Article: The Great Depression

During the *Great Depression*, radio programs and newspaper features made new connections among American families, offering instruction, entertainment and encouragement.

DURING THE 1930S, AMERICANS TURNED *INWARD*, TO REDISCOVER *HEARTH* AND HOME. Brought together by the hard times, the family was very important to them. There was, as Dorothy put it in the 1939 film version of "The Wizard of Oz," no place like home. And, as the joke said, home was the one place they couldn't throw you out.

   Today, people remember the hungry '30s as the time they never locked their doors and everyone managed with what they had, sharing what little they had. Old folks today remember their Depression community as "one big family," their round of *chores* as "kinda fun."  In city and country, local families -- Chen, Jackson, Nilsson, Sanchez, Harui, McNeil, Morelli -- shared many experiences.

   After supper, families gathered around their kitchen tables to play the new games Scrabble and Monopoly. In their living rooms, family members leaned toward the speaker of a big radio cabinet, listening to dance music, or radio plays. Station KJR broadcast President Franklin Roosevelt's *fireside chats* explaining his hopes for the New Deal.

Historical Background

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt (F.D.R.) was elected to the presidency in 1932, he promised that he would make the American people believe in their government again and to bring America out of the Great Depression. In his first *inaugural address* Roosevelt said that "we have nothing to fear but fear itself." His aims were to *calm* the *economic* fears of Americans, develop policies to solve the problems of the Great Depression, and gain the *support* of the American people for his programs. What helped him was that the entire country was behind him, something which other Presidents didn’t have. The citizens of the United States were ready for a change.

Immediately after his election, Roosevelt began to develop a set of programs to give *relief*, create jobs, and *stimulate* economic *recovery* for the U.S. These programs became known as the New Deal, a reference taken from a *campaign speech* in which he promised a "new deal for the American people."

While developing programs to help America get out of the Great Depression, Roosevelt also needed to calm the fears and restore the confidence of Americans and to gain their support for the programs of the New Deal. One of the ways FDR did this was through the radio, the most direct way to reach the American people. He was the first president to “talk” directly to the American citizens in such a personal, informal way.

During the 1930s almost every home had a radio, and families typically spent several hours a day together, listening to their favorite programs. F.D.R. called his radio talks about topics of public concern "Fireside Chats." Informal and relaxed, the talks made Americans feel as if President Roosevelt was talking directly to them. Roosevelt continued to use fireside chats throughout his presidency to address the fears and concerns of the American people as well as to inform them of the positions and actions taken by the U.S. government.

Adapted from: <http://www.bergen.org/AAST/Projects/depression/legacy.html> <http://www.nara.gov/education/cc/recover.html>

<http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/centennial/june/homeward.html>

**Step IV – General Questions**

**Answer the following questions: (Use the text and the information provided in the articles you have read.) Each answer should be up to 100 words.**

1. What is the function of the tree in the play? ( Acts I and II)
2. Describe the relations between Jim Bayliss and his wife. ( Acts I and II)
3. Why does Joe Keller commit suicide? What does he understand at the end of the play?( Act III)
4. What is the importance of Mother's slip of the tongue (פליטת פה )?
5. Describe the relations between Keller and Chris. ( Acts I, II and III)
6. Idealism versus Phoney idealism in the play ( Larry's versus Chris' and Ann's). ( Act III)
7. What are the three versions of what happened in the plant when the cracked cylinder heads were shipped out? ( Acts II and III)
8. What are Chris' ideals and what are Keller's? ( Acts II and III)

**Step V - Bridging Text and Context**

**Answer the following questions: (Use the information provided in the articles above and below and in the sites provided)**

1. Joe Keller, the father in the play you are about to read, is a product (תוצר) of the Great Depression. What type of characteristics would you expect in a person who has grown up in the atmosphere that you have just read about? Write a short paragraph describing the type of person you think he will be, and explain why. (50 words)
2. How did World War II influence the different characters in the play? (150 words).
3. This play shows the destructive effects of dishonesty. Discuss this statement in relation to two of the main characters. (200 words)

**Studying Arthur Miller's Play *All My Sons* – Background Information**

# The material here (in addition to the articles read ) will help you prepare for the final work you will do on the play All My Sons. In pairs, go through all of the material thoroughly, look up the quotes and discuss their importance. In the final work, you will be asked to relate to some of the quotes and discuss their importance in the play.

# Introduction

The action of the play is set in August 1947, in the Midwest of the U.S.A. The events depicted occur between Sunday morning and a little after two o'clock the following morning.

Joe Keller, the chief character, is a man who loves his family above all else, and has sacrificed everything, including his honor, in his struggle to make the family prosperous. He is now sixty-one. He has lost one son in the war, and is keen to see his remaining son, Chris, marry. Chris wishes to marry Ann, the former fiancée of his brother, Larry. Their mother, Kate, believes Larry still to be alive. It is this belief which has enabled her, for three and a half years, to support Joe by concealing her knowledge of a dreadful crime he has committed.

Arthur Miller, the playwright, found the idea for Joe's crime in a true story, which occurred during the Second World War: a manufacturer knowingly shipped out defective parts for tanks. These had suffered mechanical failures which had led to the deaths of many soldiers. The fault was discovered, and the manufacturer convicted. In All My Sons, Miller examines the morality of the man who places his narrow responsibility to his immediate family above his wider responsibility to the men who rely on the integrity of his work.

# The background to the action

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 airplane 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 influenza. Several weeks later twenty-one airplanes crashed on the same day, killing the pilots.

Investigation revealed the fault in the cylinder heads, and Steve and Joe were arrested and convicted. On appeal, Joe denied Steve's (true) version of events, convinced the court he knew nothing of what had happened, and was released from prison. 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 dead, as this involves the further belief that Joe has caused his own son's death, an intolerable thought. She 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.

The play opens on the following (Sunday) morning; by sheer coincidence, Ann has come to visit the Kellers. For two years, Larry's brother, Chris, has written to her. Now he intends to propose to her, hence the invitation. She is in love with him and has guessed his intention. On the Saturday night there is a storm; a tree, planted as a memorial to Larry, is snapped by the wind. Kate wakes from a dream of Larry and, in the small hours, enters the garden to find the tree broken.

## Joe Keller - an ordinary Joe or representative type

Western drama originates in the Greek tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides, all of whom wrote in Athens in the 5th century B.C. In these plays the tragic hero or protagonist (= first or most important actor) commits an offence, often unknowingly. He (occasionally she) must then learn his fault, suffer and perhaps die. In this way, the gods are vindicated (shown to be just) and the moral order of the universe restored. (This is a gross simplification of an enormous subject.)

These plays, and those of Shakespeare two thousand years later, are about kings, dukes or great generals. Why? Because in their day, these individuals were thought to embody or represent the whole people. Nowadays, we do not see even kings in this way. When writers want to show a person who represents a nation or class, they typically invent a fictitious “ordinary” person, the Man in the Street or Joe Public. In Joe Keller, Arthur Miller creates just such a representative type. Joe is a very ordinary man, decent, hard-working and charitable, a man no one could dislike. But, like the protagonist of the ancient drama, he has a flaw or weakness. This, in turn, causes him to act wrongly. He is forced to accept responsibility - his suicide is necessary to restore the moral order of the universe, and allow his beloved son, Chris, to live, free from guilt.

## Links to Greek tragedy fromWikipedia

Arthur Miller’s writing in *All My Sons* often shows great respect for the great Grecian tragedies of the likes of [Aeschylus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeschylus), [Sophocles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophocles) and [Euripides](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euripides). In these plays the tragic hero or [protagonist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protagonist) will commit an offence, often unknowingly, which will return to haunt him, sometimes many years later. The play encapsulates all the fallout from the offense into a 24 hour time span. During that day, the protagonist must learn his fault and suffer as a result, and perhaps even die. In this way the gods are shown to be just and moral order is restored. In *All My Sons*, these elements are all present; it takes place within a 24 hour period, has a protagonist suffering from a previous offense, and punishment for that offense. Additionally, it explores the father-son relationship, also a common theme in Grecian tragedies. Ann Deever could also be seen to parallel a messenger as her letter is proof of Larry's death.

In Joe Keller, [Arthur Miller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Miller) creates just a representative type. Joe is a very ordinary man, decent, hard-working and charitable, a man no-one could dislike. But, like the protagonist of the ancient drama, he has a flaw or weakness. This, in turn, causes him to act wrongly. He is forced to accept responsibility - his [suicide](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide) is necessary to restore the moral order of the universe, and allows his son, Chris, to live free from guilt and persecution. [Arthur Miller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Miller) later uses the everyman in a criticism of the [American Dream](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Dream) in [*Death of a Salesman*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_a_Salesman), which is in many ways similar to *All My Sons*.

**Useful sites:**

<http://www.shmoop.com/all-my-sons/summary.html>

<https://adeleefl.wikispaces.com/file/view/Bridging+Text+and+Context.doc/48267949/Bridging+Text+and+Context.doc>

<http://www.sparknotes.com/drama/viewbridge/context.html>  
<http://www.enotes.com/all-sons>

**All My Sons by Arthur Miller**

**1. Introduction**

*All My Sons,* Arthur Miller's first commercially successful play, opened at the Coronet Theatre in New York on January 29, 1947. It ran for 328 performances and garnered important critical acclaim for the dramatist, winning the prestigious New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.

Miller's earlier play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), had not done well and had quickly closed; therefore, at the time *All My Sons* opened, Miller's reputation as a writer was based almost solely on *Focus* (1945), his lauded novel about anti-Semitism.

*All My Sons* is now regarded as the first of Miller's major plays. The work also greatly helped the career of Elia Kazan, who had first won accolades for his direction of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* in 1942 and after directing *All My Sons* would continue to work with the plays of both Miller and Tennessee Williams to produce both legendary stage productions and important films.

In *All My Sons* Miller evidenced the strong influence of both Henrik Ibsen and Greek tragedy, developing a "formula" that he would brilliantly exploit in his next play, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), which many regard as his finest work.

**2. Author Biography**

Arthur Miller was born on October 17, 1915, in New York City. He spent his early years in comfortable circumstances, until his father, Isidore, a prosperous manufacturer, lost his wealth in the economic devastation of the Great Depression. After completing high school, Miller had to take a job in a Manhattan warehouse.

He had not been much of a student, but after reading Dostoevsky's great novel *The Brothers Karamazov* he decided that he was destined to become a writer. He had trouble getting into college but was eventually accepted at the University of Michigan, where he began his apprenticeship as a writer and won several student awards for his work.

After college he returned to New York and worked briefly as a radio script writer, then tried his hand at writing for the stage commercially. His first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), closed after only four performances, but it did win a Theater Guild award and revealed the young writer's potential.

He had more success with *Focus* (1945), a novel dealing with anti-Semitism. In fact, at the time he wrote *All My Sons* (1947), his first dramatic hit, he was better known as a writer of fiction than as a playwright.

*All My Sons* established Miller's standing as a bright and extremely talented dramatist. The play had a good run and won Miller his first New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Even the least favorable commentators recognized the playwright's great promise.

Miller followed *All My Sons* with three of his most critically and commercially successful plays: *Death of Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), and *A View from the Bridge* (1955). In these works, Miller attempted to show that tragedy could be written about ordinary people struggling to maintain personal dignity at critical moments in their lives. With these plays, Miller joined Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams in what in the post-World War II years was generally recognized as the great triumvirate of the American theater.

Miller, a political leftist, gained some notoriety in the 1950s when he refused to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee and was held in contempt of Congress. From this experience he found thematic material for one of his most famous and controversial plays, *The Crucible,* which focuses on the Salem Witch Trials of 1692.

After the 1955 production of *A View from the Bridge,* Miller took a nine-year hiatus from play-writing. In the interim, Miller married and divorced the famous actress, Marilyn Monroe. He did adapt one of his stories, *The Misfits* as a screen vehicle for his celebrated wife but did not complete another Broadway play until 1964, when both *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy* were produced. The former play, considered Miller's most experimental play, is also his darkest work, with many autobiographical parallels.

His last Broadway success was *The Price,* produced in 1968. After his next play, *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), failed on Broadway, Miller stopped premiering works in New York. He continued to write plays, and enjoyed some success, but nothing that matched that of his earliest works. Many of his later plays were short one-act plays and works comprised of sketches or vignettes.

His greatest triumphs remain *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*. Both have been revived with great success. In 1999, for example, the New York production of *Death of a Salesman* garnered four Tony awards, including one for best revival and one for best direction. At the age of eighty-four, Miller was also presented with a special, lifetime achievement award for his great contributions to the American theater.

**Historical Context**

In March of 1947, President Harry S. Truman presented the Truman Doctrine to the U. S. Congress. The Truman Doctrine was an anti-Communist declaration that would shape American foreign policy for over four decades. With the Cold War heating up, fears of an international communist conspiracy were rapidly growing. The Truman Doctrine was meant to alleviate some of those very fears.

The now infamous House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began its very visible investigations of alleged communist influence in Hollywood, resulting in the jailing and blacklisting of witnesses who refused to cooperate with investigators. The FBI, meanwhile, looked for evidence of communist infiltration in America; for example, they concluded that Frank Capra's classic Christmas film, *It's a Wonderful Life,* was little more than insidious communist propaganda.

To counter the growing spread of communism in Eastern Europe and Asia, the United States took positive steps to help rebuild the war-torn countries of both its allies and its former enemies, including Germany and Japan. On June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall announced his plan for the economic recovery of Europe. With the Brussels Treaty of March 17, 1948, the Western European Union, the forerunner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), was formed.

Meanwhile, King Michael of Romania abdicated, bringing another European country into the Soviet bloc. India and Pakistan were granted independence from Great Britain. In that same year, Mother Teresa left her Loreto order to move into the slums of Calcutta to establish her first school.

In Roswell, New Mexico, in July, 1947, there was a rash of UFO sightings and the reported crash of an alien space ship, the basis for what many still consider a lame government cover-up of the truth. Also that summer, Jackie Robinson, the first African American baseball player to play in the Major Leagues, had joined the Brooklyn Dodgers and was on his way to winning the National League Rookie of the Year award.

In cinema, Elia Kazan, the director of *All My Sons,* won an Oscar for his direction of *Gentlemen's Agreement,* a film about anti-Semitism. Chuck Yeager became the first human to break the sound barrier in October, 1947. Breaking a different kind of barrier, Bell Telephone Laboratories introduced the transistor, the first important Postwar breakthrough in the evolution of microelectronics, fundamental in the development of the post-industrial, information-age technology of the late twentieth century.