

All My Sons

Companion Packet

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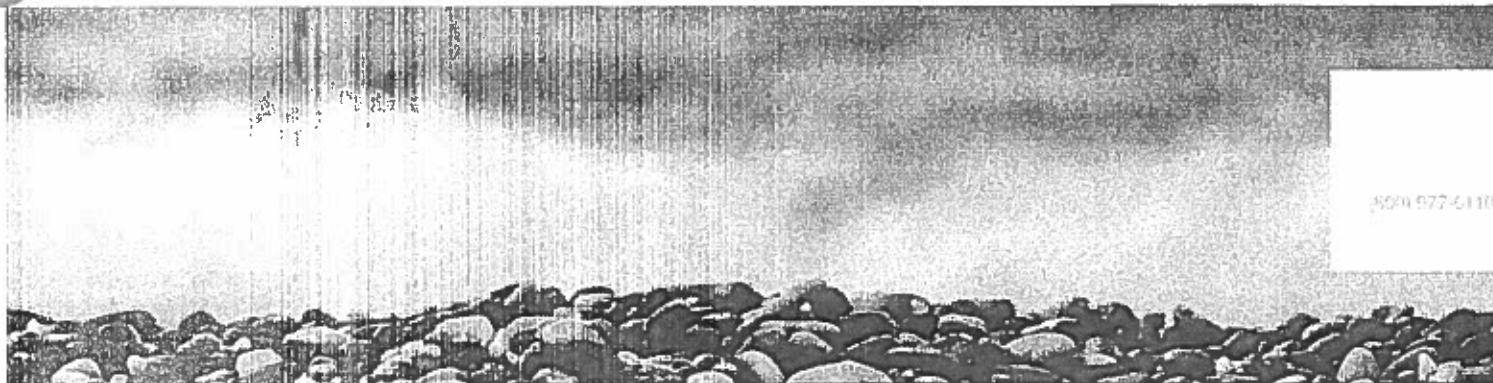
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Balancing individual and community needs

Topics : Non 12 Step, Recovery

A well-functioning family, community or society needs to have a balance between self-interested behavior, and altruistic or service behavior. If every member of a group pays attention only to his or her own immediate needs, life becomes very difficult quickly. For instance, a hunter-gatherer group that could effectively cooperate to hunt large animals would have more food, and be safer, than a group that had each member attempting to hunt alone. Solitary hunters are simply not as effective as a well-coordinated team of hunters.

It is assumed in most Western societies that individuals will naturally "look out for number one." In some non-Western societies there may be more emphasis on helping others over taking care of oneself. Perhaps the influence of capitalism has promoted an excess focus on self-interest in Western societies. Whatever the reason, in Western societies we often need to remind ourselves of the advantages of cooperation, and that our individual success will not be very satisfying if the larger community we live in is not doing well. What each individual needs to cultivate could be called enlightened self-interest, or cooperative competition, or sensible altruism. Whatever it is called, groups composed of members who balance individual and group needs function better.

As someone develops addictive behavior the balance between self-interest and helping others gets lost. Individuals whose addictive behavior is substantial enough to need addiction treatment, or even alcohol and drug rehab, are often in significant distress. That distress is often what drives them to enter treatment. That distress also keeps them very self-focused.

The individual with substantial addiction problems is likely to be not a very helpful member of a family, community or society. In fact this individual has probably become a drain on the resources of others. It is an important part of the process of addiction recovery to get back (or create for the first time) an appropriate balance between satisfying individual and community needs. Achieving that balance can take some time to develop. Here are some ways to get started:

Consider the people who are most important to you. What is on their minds right now? What is important to them at the moment? How do they feel about these matters? Do you feel you understand these individuals better, as a result of considering their point of view?

Also with the people who are most important to you, what small favors might you be able to do for them, perhaps regularly? How much satisfaction do you experience in doing these favors? Does this satisfaction lead you to think differently about yourself?

In the wider world, look for opportunities to do "random acts of kindness." How much satisfaction do you experience by doing these acts?

The path from self-centeredness to being an active member of family, community and society, and doing one's fair share (or even more), can be a long one. However, as you achieve a better balance between attempting to satisfy (or even reduce) your own needs in favor of also considering others, you will experience a substantial improvement in your sense of connection to others, self-worth and life satisfaction.

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Ethical Decisions

Period: _____

Directions: Suppose you are a sales clerk in a store and some of your friends want you to let them shoplift. Answer the following questions.

<p>If you refused to let them shoplift, would that make you a disloyal friend? Explain your answer.</p>	
<p>How would you respond if your friends said...?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- "Just turn your back. You won't even be involved."- "Don't let it bother you. Everybody does it."- "The store will never miss it."- "This store rips everybody off. We're entitled to get even."	
<p>If they shoplift despite your objection, what would you do? Explain.</p>	
<p>Many people think you can't get ahead while being dishonest. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.</p>	

Name: _____ Period: _____

All My Sons
By Arthur Miller

Background Information

Setting: August 1946, in the mid-west of the USA with the main story set between Sunday morning and a little after two o'clock the following morning

Themes: Denial and self-deception, Idealism effects on the family and individual, Business effects on the American Dream, Relationship between the individual and society/family

Directions: Write whether you agree (A) or disagree (D) with each statement and explain why you agree or disagree.

Statement	A/D	Explanation
Each individual has an obligation to contribute to society in some way.		
An individual's actions/decisions can affect his/her family.		
Our past affects our present and future.		
We sometimes deceive ourselves.		
We deny certain things in order to live well.		
A person can be successful in business, but still fail in life.		
It is okay to blame others as long as it helps you in the long run.		
The Golden Rule is "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."		
The American Dream can be achieved as long as one works hard enough.		

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February 27, 1949

Tragedy and the Common Man

By ARTHUR MILLER

In this age few tragedies are written. It has often been held that the lack is due to a paucity of heroes among us, or else that modern man has had the blood drawn out of his organs of belief by the skepticism of science, and the heroic attack on life cannot feed on an attitude of reserve and circumspection. For one reason or another, we are often held to be below tragedy—or tragedy above us. The inevitable conclusion is, of course, that the tragic mode is archaic, fit only for the very highly placed, the kings or the kingly, and where this admission is not made in so many words it is most often implied.

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instances, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations.

More simply, when the question of tragedy in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well-placed and the exalted the very same mental processes as the lowly. And finally, if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the high-bred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it.

As a general rule, to which there may be exceptions unknown to me, I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society.

Sometimes he is one who has been displaced from it, sometimes one who seeks to attain it for the first time, but the fateful wound from which the inevitable events spiral is the wound of indignity and its dominant force is indignation. Tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly.

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his "tragic flaw," a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the characters, is really nothing—and need be nothing, but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." Most of us are in that category.

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But there are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them, and in the process of action everything we have accepted out of fear of insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined, and from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us—from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment—comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy. More important, from this total questioning of what has previously been unquestioned, we learn. And such a process is not beyond the common man. In revolutions around the world, these past thirty years, he has demonstrated again and again this inner dynamic of all tragedy.

Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of his character, is really but a clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions, nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king.

The quality in such plays that does shake us, however, derives from the underlying fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world. Among us today this fear is strong, and perhaps stronger, than it ever was. In fact, it is the common man who knows this fear best.

Now, if it is true that tragedy is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly, his destruction in the attempt posits a wrong or an evil in his environment. And this is precisely the morality of tragedy and its lesson. The discovery of the moral law, which is what the enlightenment of tragedy consists of, is not the discovery of some abstract or metaphysical quantity.

The tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself. The wrong is the condition which suppresses man, perverts the flowing out of his love and creative instinct. Tragedy enlightens—and it must, in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarred from such thoughts or such actions.

Seen in this light, our lack of tragedy may be partially accounted for by the turn which modern literature has taken toward the purely psychiatric view of life, or the purely sociological. If all our miseries, our indignities, are born and bred within our minds, then all action, let alone the heroic action, is obviously impossible.

And if society alone is responsible for the cramping of our lives, then the protagonist must needs be so pure and faultless as to force us to deny his validity as a character. From neither of these views can tragedy derive, simply because neither represents a balanced concept of life. Above all else, tragedy requires the finest appreciation by the writer of cause and effect.

No tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable. In the tragic view the need of man to wholly realize himself is the only fixed star, and whatever it is that hedges his nature and lowers it is ripe for attack and examination. Which is not to say that tragedy must preach revolution.

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The Greeks could probe the very heavenly origin of their ways and return to confirm the rightness of laws. And Job could face God in anger, demanding his right and end in submission. But for a moment everything is in suspension, nothing is accepted, and in this sketching and tearing apart of the cosmos, in the very action of so doing, the character gains "size," the tragic stature which is spuriously attached to the royal or the high born in our minds. The commonest of men may take on that stature to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest, the battle to secure his rightful place in the world.

There is a misconception of tragedy with which I have been struck in review after review, and in many conversations with writers and readers alike. It is the idea that tragedy is of necessity allied to pessimism. Even the dictionary says nothing more about the word than that it means a story with a sad or unhappy ending. This impression is so firmly fixed that I almost hesitate to claim that in truth tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy, and that its final result ought to be the reinforcement of the onlooker's brightest opinions of the human animal.

For, if it is true to say that in essence the tragic hero is intent upon claiming his whole due as a personality, and if this struggle must be total and without reservation, then it automatically demonstrates the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity.

The possibility of victory must be there in tragedy. Where pathos rules, where pathos is finally derived, a character has fought a battle he could not possibly have won. The pathetic is achieved when the protagonist is, by virtue of his witlessness, his insensitivity, or the very air he gives off, incapable of grappling with a much superior force.

Pathos truly is the mode for the pessimist. But tragedy requires a nicer balance between what is possible and what is impossible. And it is curious, although edifying, that the plays we revere, century after century, are the tragedies. In them, and in them alone, lies the belief-optimistic, if you will, in the perfectibility of man.

It is time, I think, that we who are without kings, took up this bright thread of our history and followed it to the only place it can possibly lead in our time-the heart and spirit of the average man.

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Why Miller Now?

In Ancient Greece, theatre was used to hold a mirror up to society—to provoke and debate, to ask important questions of where society was headed, but not necessarily to have answers. Arthur Miller's work was heavily influenced by Greek theatre, and his need to call into question the very fabric of society is a recurring theme through all of Miller's plays.

What sets Miller apart from his contemporaries and has cemented him among America's great playwrights is his ability to tackle these grand philosophical or ideological questions within the context of a family drama. The social conscience found in his work was forged by his experience of the Great Depression, which for Miller was the most impactful event on American society since the Civil War.

Writing plays, for Miller, genuinely had the potential to alter the course of the world. He believed that a playwright's responsibility equaled, if not exceeded, that of a doctor. A doctor, after all, can save lives. But a playwright can change lives.

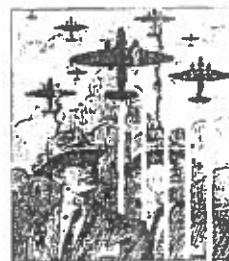
Miller recognized how necessary drama was to help a society reflect on its own actions. *The Crucible* (1953) famously uses the Salem Witch Trials as a stand-in for McCarthyism and the deeds of the House Un-American Activities Committee. But Miller found that the allegory of the play reached far beyond the witch-hunt of his own time that he was trying to evoke. He said, "I can almost tell what the political situation in a country is when the play is suddenly a hit there—it is either a warning of tyranny on the way or a reminder of tyranny just past."

Miller's work, whether cloaked in allegory or in a seemingly traditional family drama, always has something deeper lurking beneath the surface. When society is facing a moment of change or trauma, we can continue to look to this great dramatist of morality for insight into the road ahead.

Name: _____

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English 12



Reader Response

Directions: Read Arthur Miller's article "Tragedy of the Common Man" and respond to the following questions and statements. Please be sure to look up unknown vocabulary to *develop a full understanding* of Miller's article.

1. What reason does Miller give for the lack of written tragedies?

2. Why does Miller believe that modern man is equally as fitting a subject for tragedy?

3. Comment on Miller's claim that "the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his 'rightful' position in society".

4. Why does Miller make the claim that tragedy is optimistic rather than pessimistic?

Name: _____

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English 12



All My Sons: The American Dream

Has the American Dream changed with time? Look at some of the characteristics of the American Dream from previous generations. How do they differ from generation to generation? How are they the same?

Early Americans dreamed of...

- Religious freedom
- Material happiness (prosperity)

The people of the 1920s dreamed of...

- Wealth
- Happiness

The people of the 1950s idealized...

- Family
- Prosperity
- Happiness
- Stability

The people of the 1960s idealized...

- Peace
- Love
- Happiness

Now take a moment with your partner to discuss the following:

The people of 2016 dream of...

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Bayliss
Family

Jim ♥ Sue

1 child

Keller
Family

Joe ♥ Kate

Chris

Larry
(missing)

Lubey
Family

Frank ♥ Lydia
House she grew up in

3 children

Deever
Family

Steve ♥ Wife

George

Ann

Used to live here

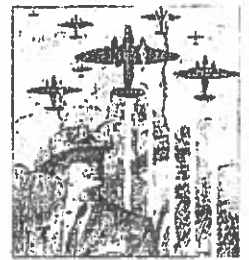
Business
Partners

WAR

Name: _____

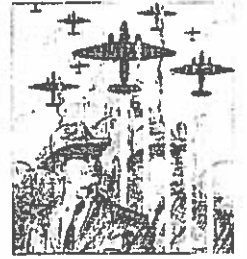
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All My Sons – Act One



Directions: Respond to the following questions and statements for Act One.

1. What is the setting of Act One (time and place)?
2. Describe Joe Keller.
3. What signs are connected to Larry's disappearance and how are they important?
4. Why does Frank say that Larry might still be alive?
5. What kind of relationship is there between Jim and Sue?
6. Describe your impression of Chris.
7. What game does Mr. Keller play with the little boy Bert?
8. Is Kate Keller a good mother? Why or why not?
9. What seems to be the conflict between Chris and his mother Kate? What is the effect on the Kellers?
10. Who is Ann and why is she there? What kind of relationship is there between Ann and the Kellers?
11. What is the relationship between Ann and Chris? How does it begin?
12. Why does Kate insist that Larry is still alive and Ann is still in love with him? What does this say about Kate's personality?
13. How does Ann feel toward her father? What is Chris's opinions of him?
14. What could be the reasons for Mr. and Mrs. Keller to defend Ann's father? How did Mr. Keller defend Ann's father?
15. What is Chris's attitude upon his return from the war, his attitude toward his father and the wealth his father made for him? What does this say about Chris' beliefs and values?
16. What news makes Joe and Kate Keller so nervous? Why?
17. What is the mood at the end of this act? What hints are revealed for Act Two?

All My Sons – Act Two and Act Three

Directions: Respond to the following questions and statements for Act Two.

1. What is the time and setting of Act Two?
2. What does Kate discuss with Chris in the beginning of Act Two?
3. What is the conversation between Sue and Ann? How does Ann react to Sue? What is your opinion of Sue?
4. Why is Ann upset with Chris?
5. What does Joe offer Steve Deever? How does Chris react?
6. Why do you think Joe gets so upset at the end of the conversation?
7. What does Jim warn Ann about and why? How do Ann and Chris react?
8. Describe George.
9. How does George insult Jim and Sue Bayliss?
10. What is the snide (hurtful; sarcastic, cutting) remark George makes about Larry's tree?
11. What is George wearing that belongs to Steve? What does this signify?
12. How does George describe their father? What does this mean?
13. What does George say he and Ann did wrong?
14. Describe the story about the day the cylinder heads were found to be cracked.
15. How did Joe "get away" with the situation?
16. How do Steve and Joe differ as "bosses"?

Page 2 / Act Two and Act Three Study Guide Questions

- 17. Why does George change his mind about his father's guilt? Why did George go to the Keller's?**
- 18. What does George compare Joe Keller's factory to? What does he mean by this?**
- 19. What does George say is "not well" with his father? What does this mean?**
- 20. What two events does Joe bring up to prove Steve never takes the blame?**
- 21. What evidence comes up that reveals Joe's guilt?**
- 22. What does Frank finish? What does it reveal?**
- 23. What does Kate do to get Chris angry? Why does she do it?**
- 24. What does Kate reveal about Larry's death?**
- 25. What does Chris finally realize?**
- 26. How does Joe defend himself and his past actions?**
- 27. How does Chris react to Joe's justification that he did it for Chris and the business?**

ACT THREE

- 28. What is the time and setting of Act Three?**
- 29. What does Jim confess to Kate in the beginning of Act Three?**
- 30. Why does Jim believe that Chris did not have any knowledge of Joe's part in the scandal?**
- 31. What does Kate suggest Joe say to Chris upon his return?**
- 32. What is Joe's justification for what he did?**

Page 3 / Act Two and Act Three Study Guide Questions

- 33. Describe Joe's speech about Larry on page 426.**
- 34. What is Ann's proposition to Kate and Joe?**
- 35. What does Ann's letter reveal to Kate?**
- 36. What is Joe's revelation after Chris reads Larry's letter aloud?**
- 37. What action does Joe take after hearing Larry's letter? Why?**
- 38. What are the major thematic issues dealt with in this play?**



Symbols

Evidence and Analysis

Directions: Describe or use a quote to identify three instances in which each symbol appears in *All My Sons*, and write a short paragraph describing the context and significance of that appearance. Then write a longer paragraph analyzing the broader meaning of the symbol in *All My Sons*.



Larry's Tree

Quote or Description	Context and Significance
1.	
2.	
3.	

Meaning of the Symbol