ALL MY SONS: Important Notes

**1} Write a note on the title of the play.**

The title of the play All My Sons is taken from the dialogue of Joe Keller. After Joe Keller reads Larry’s letter, he realizes the depth of his crime. He never intended murder, only profit and nor did he bother with the deaths because he felt they had nothing to do with him. He did not care. But he realizes that Larry did care and for Larry it was as if all the soldiers were Larry’s brothers in spirit and hence Joe’s children. Accepting this bitter realization, he speaks out that the dead soldiers were his own sons and overcome with grief and despair, he kills himself. The title does also hold forth the nationalistic spirit that the defenders of the country are the children of the motherland and hence the sons of each and every citizen of the country; invoking a solidarity of patriotism.

**2} Character Analysis of Chris Keller**

Chris Keller, the eldest son of Joe and Kate Keller is the moral compass in the play for he always turns towards integrity. In many instances he manages to struggle to do the right thing, be it wanting to reveal the truth of his relationship with Ann to his mother or taking a stand opposite Joe’s when he realizes his father’s guilt. After the death of his brother, he falls in love with his ex-fiancée Ann and wants to marry her. He has his own share of war memories and after experiencing war, it has made feel responsible for his fellow soldiers, and he does not want to take material gain for granted. Chris cares about dignity and truth. He wants to create a life with Ann built on his own values. He emerges as tragic victim of the play for when he realizes the ugly deed of his father it destroys the illusion of a stable life that he had. No more does he feel any pride or satisfaction at being his father’s son; instead, he is disgusted by it.

He is a family man but is deeply uncomfortable with the success his father's business found during the war, when so many of his comrades died pointlessly. He redirects his discomfort into an idealism and an attitude of social awareness that is foreign to his family environment. He however tries his best to maintain his moral stand when he brutally questions his father regarding his action and berates him for it, calling him less than an animal.

**3} Character Analysis of Mrs Kate Keller**

Kate is the moral center of the play. Her delusions about her dead son, Larry, lead to her anxiety, suspicions, and superstitions. Her delusions about Larry's disappearance and her vehement self-denial are symptomatic of greater issues than just a grief-stricken mother's inability to cope with the loss of a child. Nervous and suspicious, she has taken on the burden of her husband's secret while he presents the face of an untroubled conscience to the world, while she suffers from headaches and nightmares. Outwardly, Kate is a loving, simple, domesticated mother. She refuses to accept Chris’s marriage to Ann because it would mean that Larry is dead. If Larry is dead, it means that Joe is morally guilty of his son’s death, something she cannot reconcile with. She thereby denies Larry’s death because she has no choice. Accepting his suicide would mean that Joe was responsible for the deaths of the pilots in the war. When Kate reads Larry’s letter and realizes that he took his own life, she falls into despair, but she is also set free from the emotional jail that she has lived in for three years. Thus, the truth in a manner sets her free and she is one of the characters in the play who transforms by the end of it.

**4} Character Analysis of Joe Keller**

Joe Keller is the central character of the play. He is not highly educated, but he is a strong, self-made business leader, respected and popular among his neighbors and family, a personification of the post-war American Dream. But Joe has a sordid secret in his past concerning his own role in a crime that involved allowing his factory to send out faulty airplane engines, resulting in the deaths of American pilots in the war. He saved himself from persecution by shifting the blame on his partner Steve Deever. As such he is not as honest and respectable as he wants to appear, and he is driven by his single-minded desire to provide for his family.

Joe’s true nature is slowly revealed over the course of the play. He even faked having the flu on the day the faulty engines were discovered so that he would not be at the plant when they were shipped. When Larry’s letter is revealed, Joe claims that he did everything to protect his family. He then pretends that he will agree to jail, but because his true nature has been exposed, he kills himself.

Joe Keller cares most about money and family. His downfall represents the downfall of the post-war American culture, which compromised integrity for the sake of monetary and social success. Also, the cowardice of his offstage suicide shows that he cannot bear to handle the truth that he has let down his family. He chooses death over honesty and values his own American Dream above personal responsibility. Thus, American rugged individualism alienated Keller, whose past misdeeds haunt the future of his family.

**5} What is the American Dream?**

It is a set of beliefs or national ethos of United States of American that drives the citizens of the country to create an ideal life and lifestyle for themselves. It includes a set of ideals like individual rights, freedom, democracy, and equality which is bolstered by the belief that each individual has the right and freedom to seek prosperity and happiness, irrespective of their racial, religious or economic background. A key element of the American Dream is the set belief that merit and hard work with dedication and devotion to firm goals will help a man rise up in the society in America. Anyone with the right capability and willing to do hard work will rise from “rags to riches” and become financially stable, successful and gain a perfect idealistic life. This Dream thus balances the capitalist economy with the values of the society.

**6} Discuss *All My Sons* as a critique of the American Dream.**

The American Dream is a set of beliefs or national ethos of United States of American that drives the citizens of the country to create an ideal life and lifestyle for themselves. Anyone with the right capability and willing to do hard work will rise from “rags to riches” and become financially stable, successful and gain a perfect idealistic life.

In the play *All My Sons*, the description of the American Dream has to do with Joe Keller and his single-minded focus on making more and more profit to have the ideal American Life. At the end of the play the American Dream becomes awkward, for Joe Keller becomes wealthy and fortunate in his life financially but his life turns tragic as the story moves towards a final end when unable to face the truth of his actions and oncoming consequences of his destroyed American Dream Keller shoots himself to complete the nightmare.

American Dream in a way paints a hollow and capitalistic picture of life in front of the people whose emptiness is felt by the people as they race against time to slog and gain their ideal American life. People become so selfish and ethically indifferent that they do not have any sense of right and wrong in their hearts while committing crimes for profit and material gain; something that is depicted prominently through the character of Joe Keller. The family dynamic is also screwed. Outwardly it appears perfect just like the ideal concept of American Dream but in reality, there are secrets, betrayal, delusions and guilt in their relations that finally expose the weak links of bonds in the end of the play just like the futility of American Dream that comes to question. Hence this play can be seen as the critique of the American Dream.

**7} Write a note on the importance of Larry’s letter in the action of the play All My Sons.**

Larry’s letter in a way brought the entire plot to the climax. It is symbolic of all secrets being unveiled. Larry confesses that he knows about his father’s guilt and narrates how he could have killed his father for his deed. In his fury and grief, Larry writes about his intention to kill himself in a suicide mission.

This letter makes it clear to Kate Keller that there is no use hiding from the fact that Larry is dead and Ann is free to move on. It also makes this apparent that Larry killed himself because of his father and thus a father is responsible for the death of his son. This letter is also significant because it shows the reality to Joe Keller and realizing his mistake and crime, he ends up killing himself in the end of the play.

**8} How does Joe Keller try to defend his guilt?**

Joe Keller tries to defend his guilt by repeatedly declaring that whatever he did was for his family. It was his duty to make sure that his family was well taken care of and not delivering the shipments would have caused his company’s reputation to go down which would be detrimental for business. After all the world ran after profit and he was not wrong when he did the same. Hence taking the risk, he decided to engage in a criminal act just for the sake of his skewed vision and justification of committing such an act for his family.

**9}** ***“I am going out in a mission in a few minutes. They will probably report me missing. If they do, I want you to know that you mustn’t wait for me. I tell you An, if I had him there now, I could kill him”***

1. **Who is the speaker here?**

The speaker is Larry Keller.

1. **What is the circumstance that made him go out in ‘a mission’?**

Larry realizes that his father is behind the faulty equipment that resulted in the death of American soldiers. In anger, grief and guilt, he decides to go on a suicide mission.

**10} *“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 of his own. What are you?”***

1. **Who is the speaker and who is he referring to?**

The speaker is Chris Keller. He is referring to his father Joe Keller.

1. **Why does the speaker say so?**

Chris finds out about his father’s actions that led to the death of the American soldiers. He questions his father how he could have done such a heinous crime of sacrificing the defenders of the country just for some measly profit. He tells his father that he is not even an animal because even animals do not kill their own; something that Joe Keller had easily done.