

# All my sons by arthur miller: theme, genre, style

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## **THE THEME, GENRE, AND STYLE OF ALL MY SONS**

While there are many themes in this play, one that stands out as the most significant is that of honesty. It is so important because it applies to almost all the main characters in All My Sons. Joe is guilty because he has been living the lie of his noninvolvement with the deaths of the pilots; Chris hides the truth of his affections for Ann from his family; Kate cannot be honest with herself about Larry's death; and Ann withholds important information about Larry until the very end of the play. All the tragic elements of this story—both of the two suicides and the general frustration and contempt the characters have for one another—could have been avoided by simply being honest and truthful with each other. The first and most crucial lie is that of Joe—by letting Steve take the blame for the sake of Joe's family, he begins a snowball effect that lasts several years and ultimately results in heartbreak and tragedy—and, of course, his death.

Genre categorization in the theatre is always tricky, because individual plays seldom fulfill each and every one of a genre's specific characteristics. Of the standard genres, however, there is one that All My Sons most closely resembles, and it is tragedy. There are certain components of this play that fit into the classic tragedy, such as a flawed hero who commits an evil act—Joe upon revealing his guilt—who by the end is so disgraced that he meets his downfall—and in this case, death. This play certainly isn't a comedy, and we considered calling it a melodrama before realizing that it's not the correct choice. Melodramas focus on exaggerated plot that appeals to emotions rather than detailed characterizations; therefore, since the characters in All

My Sons are incredibly complex and detailed, tragedy is the more suitable choice.

All My Sons is a representational show because it consists of a set with the illusion of reality, with no audience interaction nor direct contact with them (where a presentational show would be overtly theatrical by nature and would seek to break the fourth wall quite often). The production of this show would fit in the category of simplified realism, because it is realistic show, but not as specifically realistic as one using naturalism would be. In other words, the set would only be as realistic as it needs to be in order to properly convey the illusion of reality; it would not need to be bogged down by the details, as it is primarily a character- and story-driven play.

The ideal set would be minimalistic and take place in a black box theatre with thrust seating (audience on three sides of the stage). A black box theatre would be the best choice because the closer the audience is to the characters, the more intimate and poignant the story can be, and the urgency and harshness of the conclusion is all the more emphasized in such a setting. It also fits the size of the space quite well having it be a black box, since a suburban lawn is roughly the size of a black box performance space anyway (although black boxes do vary in size).

The majority of the stage area would be the front yard of the suburban Keller residence. The floor could be painted green to illustrate the grass—but subtly, not to take too much attention away from the story. At the upstage wall would be the wall of the house, with a porch and a front door leading offstage. There would be a sidewalk leading from the porch to offstage left,

where the imaginary “ driveway” would be positioned. There may be a mailbox on the sidewalk, and scattered across the yard would be a few lawn chairs, in addition to a small glass table with three chairs in one corner of the stage. The oh-so-important Larry tree would be positioned upstage right at the side of the porch, out of the way but constantly on the audience’s mind.

The only level other than the ground floor would be the porch, and it would only be used when the actors enter and exit the stage through the front door; this ensures the characters are in the lawn most of the time and are in close proximity to the audience. As for lighting, nothing too flashy would be used (this is realism, after all, not expressionism), with the exception of the UR tree being lit at points in the story where attention to it is demanded.