Answers to questions on Drama should refer to the text and to such relevant features as characterisation, key scene(s), structure, climax, theme, plot, conflict, setting . . .Choose a play which you feel has a turning-point. Describe briefly what happens at this turning point and then, by referring to appropriate techniques, go on to explain how it makes an impact on the play as a whole.

 

“All My Sons” (1947) by Arthur Miller is a play which deals with the destruction of a family due to the secrets and lies it keeps regarding the source of their wealth. This essay will show how a turning point (the accidental slip of the truth by Kate) impacts on the characters and the finale of the drama.

In the play, the turning point comes at the end of the second act. Joe and Kate are about to go out for dinner with the family, when Joe remarks that he can’t afford to be sick. Kate follows this up by saying, “He hasn’t been laid up in fifteen years.” This is a crucial moment as it shows that Joe’s claims to have been ill on the day of the cylinder-head incident cannot be true. From this point, Chris’s view of his father, his mother and his life are all changed. This point in the play is dramatic as it is the first time the truth has been aired, and consequently it grabs the audience’s attention. It destroys the sense of trust which Joe and Kate have developed with Chris (their son), and proves that their wealth has been bought by Joe’s willingness to profit from the deaths of the airmen who flew the planes which crashed. It is the climactic point of the second act, and ushers in the turmoil of the third, when the truth of Larry’s death also emerges. The turning point works dramatically because it comes from a slip-of-the-tongue by Kate. It is not deliberate, but its impact is powerful on all of the characters.

The turning point is a climax which is developed from earlier in the play. The family has spent a lot of time denying that Joe had done anything wrong, and this is turned around when Kate makes her slip. In the first act, Joe deceives himself by claiming that the money he earned in the war was not as a result of the faulty cylinder-heads. He explains to his family, “It’s good money, there’s nothing wrong with that money”. By insisting that the money is “good”, Joe is showing himself to be in denial – he does not accept that he has profited from the bad cylinder-heads. It is important to see here that Joe is deliberately misleading the others. He claims that the decision to sell the cylinder heads was “a mistake, but it ain’t murder”. Here, he is acknowledging that something went wrong but he is distancing himself from any blame. This is typical of his character, trying to obscure the truth. However, this all changes when Kate accidentally blurts out the truth.