**A View from the Bridge: Historical Context**

McCarthyism

McCarthyism is the practice of making accusations of **disloyalty, subversion, or treason** without proper regard for evidence. The term has its origins in the period in the United States, lasting roughly from 1950 to 1956 and characterized by **heightened fears of communist influence** on American institutions and espionage by Soviet agents.

During the McCarthy era, thousands of Americans were accused of being Communists or communist sympathizers and became the subject of **aggressive investigations**. Many people suffered loss of employment and/or destruction of their careers; some even suffered **imprisonment**. Most of these punishments came about through trial verdicts later overturned. **Arthur Miller** was himself one of the people questioned at this time.

**How is this information relevant to the play?** Think about characters, key scenes and language.

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Italian Immigrants

All of the characters have **blood links** to Italy and are **immigrants**. Traditionally, Italians are seen to have **fiery tempers** and be **quick to anger**. Immigrants lead difficult lives and usually faced persecution from other Americans, which is why they live together for **protection**; Red Hook, Brooklyn, is the setting for the play. Alfieri paints a vivid picture in the prologue of **hard working**, **lower class** people who have links with **crime**. **Honour**, **community** and **respect** are vital to the immigrants.

**How is this information relevant to the play?** Think about characters, key scenes and language.

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The American Dream

The **American Dream** is a set of **ideals** in which **freedom** includes the opportunity for prosperity and success, and an upward **social mobility** achieved through hard work. In the definition of the American Dream by James Truslow Adams in 1931, "life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" regardless of **social class** or **circumstances of birth**.

**How is this information relevant to the play?** Think about characters, key scenes and language.

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Tragedy: the genre

Arthur Miller wrote the play, ’’A View from the Bridge’’, as a **modern version of a Greek Tragedy** (a central character is led by fate, to a destiny which cannot be escaped). Alfieri acts as a ‘**chorus’**; he cannot avert the tragedy, Alfieri can only observe and set the problems in a **wider context**. Alfieri cannot help; he can only watch the tragedy unfold. Alfieri’s perspective heightens the sense of **tragedy that develops** as the play progresses. In his first speech Alfieri identifies the play’s ‘’bloody’’ outcome. (P4) The audience shares **Alfieri’s perspective**: looking back on the events, which he narrates. Alfieri acts as the detached external observer; he observes all sides of the situation. Alfieri is the ‘bridge’ from which all is seen. He tries to show **all sides of the situation** from the detached eminence of the external observer. Alfieri acts as a chorus and a ‘link’: linking and **commenting** on action. He introduces Eddie as the **hero** of the play but establishes him as an ‘ordinary’ man.

**How is this information relevant to the play?** Think about characters, key scenes and language.

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Writing about the Historical Context in your Essays

Imbedding the historical context into your essays will help you to receive a higher grade. Try to include it after commenting on a character (and their language) or scene.

Below are two examples of effective analysis that lack historical references. Read the analysis and rewrite the passage including appropriate references to the historical context.

Beth’s answer:

The audience can see Eddie becoming more angry and frustrated with Catherine: “can’t you stand to live a couple of blocks away from him? Get them out of the house!” The audience now get to see the real nasty side of Eddie as he is showing his jealousy of Rodolfo and he is speaking to Catherine in an aggressive manner when she has done nothing wrong.

**Rewrite/adapt the answer and include the appropriate historical information**.

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Jess’ answer:

When Eddie says “Catherine, you never mix yourself with somebody else’s family”, he is referring to the Lipari family but this could imply that he wants Catherine to say in the family as he secretly loves her. This may shock the audience as he seems to be protecting Catherine, when in reality, he is betraying them by reporting Rodolfo and Marco to the Immigration Bureau.

**Rewrite/adapt the answer and include the appropriate historical information**.

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