

A View from the Bridge by Arthur Miller

This guide is written for teachers and students who are studying Arthur Miller's play *A View from the Bridge*. The guide is written specifically for students in the UK, but I hope it may be helpful to users from other parts of the world.

Introduction

This guide is written to help you, but is no substitute for knowing the text. Either read this to yourself, as you would a prose work (it is quite short) or read it aloud. If you can get hold of a recorded version you could listen to this, or you could make a recording of some key episodes yourself. Mark your copy of the play with under-linings and bookmarks. The Heinemann edition of the play has a good general introduction, and you should certainly read this.

This play can be discussed in many different ways and some areas you might like to focus on are: **character**, **action**, **dramatic devices** and **dramatic structures**.

A short history of the play

I am grateful to Nicole de Sapio, who has provided this account.

A View from the Bridge has an unusually complicated performance history. It was originally a screenplay called *The Hook*, written by Miller with assistance from Elia Kazan, who had previously directed the playwright's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. The script, dealing as it then did with "waterfront corruption and graft" was eventually withdrawn by Miller in response to the Hollywood studio's complaints that it was un-American (this was, of course, the age of McCarthy – the early 1950s). *The Hook's* basic themes would nonetheless resurface in Kazan's 1954 film, *On the Waterfront*.

Inspired now by the true story of a Brooklyn dockworker who informed on two illegal immigrants, Miller reconceived *The Hook* as *A View from the Bridge*. The play, a one-act verse drama, was a mild failure on Broadway in 1955; critics found its austere style uninvolved. Miller had wanted to create a play that would simply tell the tale he himself had heard, with no attempt to gain audience sympathy for Eddie's – or anyone else's – plight. Consequently, nothing was allowed onstage that did not directly contribute to the action. But Miller ultimately found that he had created a cold play, rather than a fascinating and suspenseful one.

In 1956, *A View from the Bridge* was revised for a new London production. The verse became prose, the length was expanded to two acts, and the characters were allowed to speak more - thus becoming more human and more sympathetic. Whilst we may not identify with the Eddie Carbone of the final version, we are better able to understand what motivates him and therefore to sympathize with his basic dilemma: how to 'let go' of the niece he has raised and loved as a daughter. As Miller writes in his introduction to the published revision:

'Eddie Carbone is still not a man to weep over ... But it is more possible now to relate his actions to our own and thus to understand

ourselves a little better, not only as isolated psychological entities, but as we connect to our fellows and our long past together.'

Eddie Carbone: a representative type

Western drama originates in the Greek tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides, all of whom wrote in Athens in the 5th century B.C. Drama, theatre, actor and tragedy are all Greek words. In these plays the tragic hero or protagonist (first or most important actor) commits an offence, often unknowingly. He must then learn his fault, suffer and perhaps die. In this way, the gods are vindicated and the moral order of the universe restored. (This is a gross simplification of an enormous subject.)

These plays, and those of Shakespeare two thousand years later, are about kings, dukes or great generals. Why? Because in their day, these individuals were thought to embody or represent the whole people. Nowadays, we do not see even kings in this way. When writers want to show a person who represents a nation or class, they typically invent a fictitious 'ordinary' person, the 'Man in the street' or 'Joe Public'. In Eddie Carbone, Miller creates just such a representative type. He is a very ordinary man, decent, hard-working and charitable, a man no-one could dislike. But, like the protagonist of the ancient drama, he has a flaw or weakness. This, in turn, causes him to act wrongly. The consequences, social and psychological, of his wrong action destroy him. The chorus figure, Alfieri, then explains why it is better to 'be civilised' and 'settle for half', thus restoring the normal moral order of the universe.

If Eddie is meant to represent everyman, does this mean that Miller believes all men love their nieces (those who have nieces)? Of course not. What Miller does suggest is that we have basic impulses, which civilisation has seen as harmful to society, and taught us to control. We have self-destructive urges, too, but normally we deny these. Eddie does not really understand his improper desire, and thus is unable to hide it from those around him or from the audience. In him we see the primitive impulse naked, as it were: this explains Alfieri's puzzling remark that Eddie 'allowed himself to be perfectly known'.

Clearly, Eddie is, in the classical Greek sense, the protagonist of the play. Alfieri tells us this at the end of his opening address: 'This one's name was Eddie Carbone...' Eddie is the subject of Alfieri's narrative, and all other characters are seen in relation to him. We are shown at first a good man who seems perfectly happy: he has the dignity of a job he does well, he is liked in the close-knit community of Red Hook, he has the love of wife and foster-daughter/niece, and his doubts about Catherine's prospective job are not very serious.

Showing a happy domestic scene is a favourite device of Miller's. Next a **catalyst** is introduced, and we see, by steady and inexorable stages how the happiness is destroyed. A catalyst is literally something which speeds up a chemical reaction; in this play it refers metaphorically to Rodolpho, one of Beatrice's illegal immigrant cousins. Catherine's attraction to him brings Eddie's love for his niece into the open. This unlawful love first appears in Eddie's obsessive concern with Catherine's appearance and way of dressing: 'I think it's too short,' he says of a dress. He goes on: 'Katie, you are walkin' wavy! I don't like the looks they're givin' you in the candy store. And with them new high heels on the sidewalk - clack, clack, clack. The heads are turnin' like windmills.'

Later, as Catherine is attracted to Rodolpho, Eddie tries to discredit his rival: he first implies that Rodolpho is not serious, merely in search of American citizenship. When this fails he comes to believe that Rodolpho is a homosexual, and tries to show up his lack of

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manliness. The failure of this in turn causes him to betray Rodolpho and Marco, a futile gesture, as Rodolpho is allowed to stay. Indeed, his marriage to Catherine is brought forward to secure his staying in the country. Marco's accusation of Eddie leads him, in the latter stages of the play, to an impossible effort to recover his good name in the community. In his doomed attempt to force Marco to take back his accusation, Eddie dies.

This **general** outline of Eddie's declining fortune in the play can now be seen in more detail. When Eddie meets the brothers he is friendly to both, but he warms quickly to Marco, a man's man, and superficially like Eddie. When Marco 'raises a hand to hush' Rodolpho we read that Eddie 'is coming more and more to address Marco only'. He is made uneasy by the talkative young man with his unusual blond hair.

Eddie will seek to discredit any rival. In Rodolpho's case, he quickly finds a 'reason' for this. Rodolpho is slightly-built, blond, a good singer and dancer, and he can cook and make dresses. Moreover, Mike and Louis seem to share this view: 'He comes around, everybody's laughin', ' says Mike. The stage directions indicate seven times that Mike and Louis laugh; finally, they 'explode in laughter'. After this, Eddie abuses his trust as a wise father-figure to persuade Catherine that Rodolpho is a 'hit-and-run guy' and 'only bowin' to his passport'. She protests disbelief but is clearly shaken until Beatrice reassures her.

Eddie tells Alfieri of Rodolpho, that 'he ain't right', and that 'you could kiss him, he was so sweet', but Alfieri advises him that there is nothing he can do. In the conclusion to the first act, we see how Miller has choreographed the action.

- First, Rodolpho dances with Catherine, symbolically taking her from Eddie. Eddie's bitter response is three times to repeat the formula: 'He sings, he cooks, he could make dresses...I can't cook, I can't sing, I can't make dresses, so I'm on the water front. But if I could cook, if I could sing, if I could make dresses, I wouldn't be on the water front'. The stage direction tells us that Eddie has been 'unconsciously twisting the newspaper' and that he senses 'he is exposing the issue'.
- In the second movement, Eddie tells Rodolpho about boxing matches and offers to teach him to box. After allowing Rodolpho to land some blows, Eddie strikes him harder: 'It mildly staggers Rodolpho'. The three onlookers all see what Eddie is trying to do, but his attempt to make Catherine think less of Rodolpho has failed.
- The third, and final movement comes from Marco, who invites Eddie to lift a chair by one of its legs. When Eddie fails, Marco lifts the chair, and raises it 'like a weapon over Eddie's head'. Once more, the other characters watch the action attentively.

The second act opens with an episode which relies equally on the stage action, as the drunken Eddie kisses both Catherine (to show her how a 'real man' kisses) and Rodolpho (partly to show Catherine that he enjoys it, and that his failure to resist it is significant; partly, just to humiliate Rodolpho). The first kiss (which is near-incestuous) and the second (because a man kisses another) will repel the audience.

In 1955, when the play was first performed, the double kiss would have been utterly shocking. Eddie has lost the audience's sympathy, and loses it yet further when he calls the immigration authorities. At the time, we see how the phone-booth gradually lights up, symbolizing the triumph of Eddie's desperation over his conscience.

Earlier in the play, Eddie has told the story of Vinnie Bolzano, precisely to show us his belief in loyalty to family and community. There is also irony in Eddie's doing exactly the same thing of which he has spoken with such horror. Eddie has warned Catherine that 'you can quicker get back a million dollars that was stole than a word that you gave away'.

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Now he find this to be true: his feigned horror on finding the Liparis have relatives sharing with Marco and Rodolpho, and his suggestion that they are being tracked, coming just before the immigration officers arrive, is a giveaway. Eddie tries to outface Marco, but the accusation is believed. Lipari and his wife, Louis and Mike, the stage representatives of the wider community, one by one leave Eddie alone, symbolizing his isolation.

The climax of the play is like the 'showdown' at the end of a western. Marco is coming to punish Eddie; Eddie in return will demand his 'name' back. Marco believes it is dishonourable to let Eddie live, but has given his word not to kill him. Eddie's pulling a knife means that Marco can see justice done, while keeping his word. Again the action is symbolic of the play's deeper meaning. Eddie literally dies by his own hand, which holds the knife, and is killed by his own weapon; but Eddie also metaphorically destroys himself, over the whole course of the play. And this is what Alfieri introduces to at the play's opening: the sight of a man destroying himself, while those around him are as powerless as a theatre audience to prevent it.

We have considered Eddie in terms of what he does and says, but we should also consider how we are meant, finally, to see him.

Alfieri's speeches generally explain Eddie's actions and Alfieri's own inability to save him. But his last speech tries to explain the mystery of Eddie's character. Most of us, says Alfieri, are 'civilized', 'American' rather than Sicilian. Most of us 'settle for half', and this has to be a good thing. (He has earlier told us with relief of the passing of the gangster era, and that he no longer keeps a loaded gun in his filing cabinet). But although Eddie's death was 'useless', yet 'something perversely pure calls to [Alfieri] from his memory - not purely good, but himself purely, for he allowed himself to be wholly known'. Most of us, says Alfieri, being more educated, more sophisticated, more in control, can either hide our feelings or, better, overcome them.

Eddie is a suitable subject for a modern tragedy because the potential for self-destruction, which is in all of us, in Eddie's case has destroyed him. And apart from this improper love, Eddie is a good man; and this love has its origin in the quite proper love of father for child, and Eddie's sense of duty to his family and community. This is shown in the early part of the play in the love and trust Catherine and Beatrice have for Eddie, and of what we learn of his hustling for work when Catherine was a baby. Eddie is a very ordinary man, a decent and well-liked man, and yet the one flaw in his character forces those around him and Alfieri to watch 'powerless' (as does the audience) as the case runs 'its bloody course'.

Alfieri

After Eddie, Alfieri's is probably the most important rôle in the play. He is, of course, **in** some (not much) of the action, as Eddie consults him. This is essential, as it explains how he has come to know the story. Miller has said that he wanted to make this play a modern equivalent of classical Greek tragedy. In the ancient plays, an essential part was that of the chorus: a group of figures who would watch the action, comment on it, and address the audience directly.

In *A View from the Bridge*, Alfieri is the equivalent of the chorus. He introduces the action as a retelling of events already in the (recent) past. By giving details of place, date or time, he enables the action to move swiftly from one episode to another, without the characters having to give this information. This is often skilfully mixed with brief comment: 'He was as good a man as he had to be...he brought home his pay, and he lived. And toward ten

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o'clock of that night, after they had eaten, the cousins came.' Because much of this is fact, we believe the part which is opinion.

We also trust a lawyer to be a good judge of character and rational, because he is professionally detached. Alfieri is not quite detached, however. His connection with Eddie is slight: 'I had represented his father in an accident case some years before, and I was acquainted with the family in a casual way.' But in the next interlude, Alfieri tells us how he is so disturbed, that he consults a wise old woman, who tells him to pray for Eddie.

- Consider what Alfieri says in each of the interludes.

In those brief scenes when Alfieri speaks to Eddie, we gain an insight into his idea of settling for half. He repeatedly tells Eddie that he should not interfere, but let Catherine go, 'and bless her', that the only legal question is how the brothers entered the country 'But I don't think you want to do anything about that.'

As Eddie contemplates the betrayal, Alfieri reads his mind and repeatedly warns him: 'You won't have a friend in the world...Put it out of your mind.'

Alfieri as the chorus/narrator need never leave the stage. Stage directions refer not to exits and entrances but to the light going down or coming up on Alfieri at his desk, as we switch from the extended bouts of action (flashbacks to Alfieri) to the interludes which allow him to comment, to move forward in time, and give brief indications of circumstantial detail, such as the source of the whisky Eddie brings home at the start of Act Two. Alfieri's view is also the 'view from the bridge' of the title. To those around Eddie, those 'on the water front', the events depicted are immediate, passionate and confused. But the audience has an ambiguous view.

In the extended episodes of action we may forget, as Marco lifts the chair, or as Eddie kisses Rodolpho, that Alfieri is narrating. What we see is theatrical and exciting; we are involved as spectators. But at the end of the episode, as the light goes up on Alfieri, we are challenged to make a judgement. If Eddie, as we see him, appeals to our hearts, Alfieri makes sure we also judge with our heads.

Catherine and Beatrice

Both Catherine and Beatrice are very likeable characters. Miller deliberately developed the part of each in revising the play for its London production (and this is the version he has chosen to publish). In studying Catherine you should consider how Eddie sees her, and how she sees him. In the course of the play the second of these changes considerably.

- What are the key events that cause this change?

Beatrice is a much more stable character. Where the young Catherine is uncertain, Beatrice is mature and has a clear view of matters. Eddie's ceasing to have sexual relations with her, of course helps her see his problem. She talks to Eddie and to Catherine, but her relationship to Eddie seems more that of a friend than that of wife and lover.

Eddie has a more obvious relationship with Catherine. We watch her gradually free herself of dependence on him, as she moves closer to Rodolpho, but Eddie's kiss accelerates the process. She is bitter in her condemnation of Eddie after he has betrayed

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Marco and Rodolpho, but she shows she still cares for him when she says: 'I never meant to do nothing bad to you', as he dies. The two women have a good relationship with each other; this is never as intense as Catherine's relationship with Eddie, but it outlasts it.

Beatrice has reason to be jealous but is generous to Catherine at all times. She knows Eddie has done a terrible thing in calling the authorities, but stands by him. Both women are present as Eddie dies, and their concern makes Alfieri's plea for our sympathy more persuasive.

- Look at Catherine's relations with Eddie, with Beatrice and with Rodolpho; look at Beatrice in relation to her niece and husband. Is Beatrice's childlessness significant?
- Look at Catherine's actions which show her closeness to Eddie. She brings him a beer or lights a cigar; Beatrice tells us that she sits on the edge of the bath while Eddie shaves, and walks around in her slip (we do not see this), and Catherine explains to Rodolpho how she can sense Eddie's moods: 'I can tell a block away when he's blue in his mind and just wants to talk to somebody...' Catherine's part is ambiguous in several ways: she is, at seventeen, but socially inexperienced, both little girl (Rodolpho calls her this) and adult woman; to Eddie she acts both as daughter and as lover; she is a simple, pretty girl from Brooklyn but Eddie sees her as a 'Madonna.' (This has nothing to do with the celebrated singer, who was not even born in 1955. It refers to the Virgin Mary as she is depicted in Old Master paintings of the nativity. Madonna literally means 'my lady', in Italian - the language of Eddie's native land.)

Marco and Rodolpho

In the play the brothers, widely separated by age, are usually referred to in this order, but Rodolpho is more prominent in the first act and at the start of the second, while Marco becomes more important towards the end of the play.

- Why do you think this is?

In every sense except their being brothers, the two are unlike. This is not just a subtle matter of character, but is shown in ways which are obvious in a theatre. They look different, they act differently and their speech differs.

Rodolpho is slender, graceful and (unusually in a Sicilian) blond-haired (Eddie nicknames him 'Danish'); he is strong enough to work, but weaker than the thick-set Eddie. Marco is not simply strong by contrast, he is unusually strong by any standard, and excites admiring comment from Mike. Marco is dark and powerfully built.

Where Rodolpho speaks almost incessantly, Marco is often silent. He has some difficulty speaking English, but this is not his only reason. He is very attentive to what is going on and being said, he thinks and then speaks, and he clearly believes actions speak louder than words, whether in unloading a ship or threatening Eddie. In the latter case, as he raises a chair like a weapon, he is able to express an idea which he would not wish to put into words as it would seem to show ingratitude to his host. Rodolpho is an enthusiast for all things American.

This explains why he spends money on fashionable clothes and records, of which Eddie so disapproves. He loves Catherine but is appalled at her suggestion that they return to Italy. Marco, on the other hand, clearly misses his family and has only come to the U.S.A. out of love for them. Rodolpho has learned, presumably from tourists, records and books, how to speak fluent English. Marco speaks more slowly and less correctly, but with simple dignity and clarity. Because there is no regular paid work in his home country, Rodolpho

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has learned other ways to support the family: there is nothing so odd in his singing, cooking and dress-making skills. But in a world where there is work, and men's and women's tasks are clearly defined, as in Red Hook, these talents are suspect.

Both Rodolpho and Marco are proud, but Marco has a stronger sense of the traditional values of the community. When Eddie attempts a joke about the 'surprises' awaiting men who return from working in the U.S.A. for several years, Marco corrects him, while appearing not to see anything funny in the suggestion. It is Marco who tells Alfieri that at home Eddie would already be dead for his betrayal: he feels even more strongly than Eddie the values which Eddie expresses in telling the story of Vinnie Bolzano. Rodolpho, on the other hand, tries to calm his brother, and offers Eddie a chance to make peace, a chance which Eddie spurns.

Marco feels a sense of responsibility for his brother (he tells him to 'come home early') but also feels responsible to the community, and ready to punish the one who has injured its unity: Eddie.

It is Rodolpho whom Eddie first seeks to eliminate (by suggesting to Catherine that he is homosexual, then by betraying him and Marco to the authorities). But after Marco spits in his face and announces: 'I accuse that one', Eddie's quarrel is with the elder brother. He will barely speak to Rodolpho and refers to him in the third person when he is present: 'He didn't take my name; he's only a punk. Marco's got my name.' Eddie understands that, in effect, a challenge has been issued by Marco and contradicting Marco is Eddie's only way of trying to recover the lost name. In fact this is as impossible as it is for him to have Catherine as a lover.

Dramatic techniques

If you can, read the comments on pages xiv – xix of the Hereford Plays edition, and note the discussion of Alfieri's function as narrator and commentator. How the playwright tells the story on stage is a matter of dramatic technique. To give an essay on the subject some kind of plan, you need to write a section on as many of the following as you understand: the structure of the play in episodes and interludes; the rôle of Alfieri; action, as shown in stage directions; the set and other properties, including effects of sound and lighting; the language of the dialogue, and symbolism.

Structure

The structure of the play is quite simple. Originally a one-act drama, the play was extended to allow an expanded part for Catherine and Beatrice. At this point an interval became necessary, and Miller used the two acts to mark a division in Eddie's story: in the **first** act, he tries to keep Catherine from falling in love with Rodolpho; in the **second**, he finds he has failed in this, and first throws Rodolpho out of the house, then tries to have him deported as an illegal immigrant, which provokes the fatal confrontation with Marco, as Eddie tries to recover his name. Within each act are clear episodes.

- Identify these episodes and find the interludes of comment and narration from Alfieri which mark where each begins and ends.

Action

Action is most important in this play. Because of Eddie's and Marco's limitations as speakers, and because some matters cannot be openly discussed, ideas are often shown

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in gesture and action. Sometimes this is apparently minor detail, but at times it is highly symbolic. When we see Catherine serve food (p.11) or offer Eddie a beer (p.5) or light a cigar for him (p.15), when we hear of how she sits on the bath as he shaves and walks around in her slip, we are being told about their relationship. Without being lovers, they have the kind of intimacy only lovers should have. For a 1950s audience, familiar with the image from hundreds of films, the lighting of the cigar would possibly be the most suggestive action.

Later in Act One, we see Eddie sitting, reading the paper, while Marco reads a letter; Rodolpho helps Beatrice stack the dishes and then reads a movie magazine with Catherine.

- What does this suggest?

At moments of high drama or climaxes, we often see some very striking action. The climax of Act One is beautifully choreographed by Miller: Rodolpho teaches Catherine to dance, the action allowing physical closeness; Eddie, to 'win back' his beloved, humiliates Rodolpho in a boxing 'lesson'; but the final action trumps Eddie's, as Marco, who has silently watched what is happening, shows Eddie the danger he invites by threatening Rodolpho. Politeness does not permit Marco to say anything, and the gesture is far more effective as the audience sees the chair 'raised like a weapon' over Eddie's head, symbolizing the destruction he will shortly bring on himself.

The two kisses at the start of Act Two are equally effective on stage: one with its suggestion of incest and the other illustrating Eddie's mistaken belief in Rodolpho's homosexuality. When Marco is arrested he shows his condemnation of Eddie before he speaks it, as he spits in his face. The final action of the play is where Eddie dies by his own hand (a metaphor of his self-destruction) and his own weapon (perhaps a metaphor for his sexuality).

Set, properties, sound and lighting

The set of the play is not (or should not be) naturalistic (closely or exactly resembling what it depicts). The building is 'skeletal' but the few props (properties – objects used on stage) are authentic-looking. The arrangement enables the inside of the apartment, the street outside and Alfieri's office all to be represented without any scene changes. The area in use will be lighted when needed, otherwise dark. Alfieri can remain on stage throughout, if need be: the light can go up or down as required. Props may be as simple as the coins Mike and Louis pitch, or Eddie's pocket knife for cutting an apple. One very important prop is the phonograph (record-player) which is used in the dancing episode, to play Paper Doll. At the start of the play a foghorn tells us where we are. Lighting is used theatrically, as the phone booth glows brighter and brighter, signalling Eddie's idea, then determination, to call the immigration officials.

Language

The device of depicting Italian and Sicilian immigrants, enables Miller to make them more or less articulate in English. Only Alfieri, is a properly articulate, educated speaker of American English: for this reason he can explain Eddie's actions to us, but not to Eddie, who does not really speak his language. Eddie uses a naturalistic Brooklyn slang ('quicker' for 'more quickly', 'stole' for 'stolen' and so on). His speech is simple, but at the start of the play is more colourful, as he tells Catherine she is 'walkin' wavy' and as he calls her 'Madonna'.

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Catherine's speech is more often in grammatically standard forms, but not always. Her meekness is shown in the frequency with which her speeches begin with 'Yeah', agreeing with, or qualifying, Eddie's comments.

Rodolpho speaks with unnatural exactness. The words are all English but the phrases are not always idiomatic. He recalls vivid details of his life in Sicily, and he is given to poetic comparisons, as when (p. 46) he likens Catherine to 'a little bird' that has not been allowed to fly.

Marco has to think before he can speak in whole phrases or sentences; this means he says little, which, on stage, reinforces two ideas: that Marco is thoughtful, and that he is a man of action, rather than words.

Symbolism

Symbolism is most often found in the action, and has been discussed above (the dancing, the chair-as-weapon, Eddie's dying by his own hand). The set as well as accommodating the action is symbolic of Eddie's world and values: the apartment (home, where the family is) and the street (the wider community, where he meets friends).

The story of Vinny Bolzano is a parable about the need for solidarity and loyalty in the community (this ranks even above family ties, it seems), but also is prophetically symbolic of Eddie's own act of treachery.

Finally, there is symbolism in the play's title. After we see have seen the play, we wonder why the play is so named. We are made to think of the more panoramic view, which sees things, from afar, in relation to each other. It is not the view from ground level or the 'water front', but a detached and objective view. This is the view we should have of Eddie, the view of Alfieri, the view that is 'civilised' and will 'settle for half'.

An outline of the play

Act One

- **Prologue:** (Spoken by Alfieri); pp. 3,4*
- **Episode 1:** Eddie, Catherine and Beatrice look forward to the arrival of Beatrice's cousins; pp. 5-15
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); p. 15
- **Episode 2:** Later the same evening the cousins arrive; pp. 16-22
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); p. 22
- **Episode 3:** Some weeks later Catherine and Rodolpho have been to the cinema; pp. 22-31
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); p. 31
- **Episode 4:** Eddie consults Alfieri; pp. 31-35
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); p. 35
- **Episode 5:** A domestic scene; dancing, boxing, chair-lifting; pp. 35-42

Act Two

- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); p. 43

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- **Episode 6:** December 23rd; Catherine and Rodolpho; the two kisses; pp. 43-48
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); p. 48
- **Episode 7:** December 27th; Eddie visits Alfieri, warned against phoning; pp. 48-49
- **Episode 8:** Same day; Eddie and Beatrice; Marco and Rodolpho arrested; Eddie accused; pp. 50-58
- **Episode 9:** Some days later (wedding day); Alfieri counsels Marco; pp. 58-60
- **Episode 10:** Just before the wedding; Eddie confronts Marco, who kills him; pp. 60-64
- **Epilogue:** (Spoken by Alfieri); p. 64

* Page numbers are as in the Hereford Plays (Heinemann) edition.

You can see from this outline that each act contains the same number of episodes, but that these vary in length, while the first act is roughly twice the length of the second. There are interludes in which Alfieri addresses the audience directly, between all the episodes in the first act. In the second act, the interludes are not maintained, but there are episodes of action in which Alfieri is present. We know when the action ends, but not when it begins. References (by Alfieri) to weeks passing and 'many afternoons' suggest a fairly long time. In the first episode, Catherine has a chance to 'save' most of the academic year, while Mike and Louis pitch coins; later Eddie sits on an iron railing. This would indicate that the cousins come some time in the summer.

Detailed commentary on the play

Episode 1

The dialogue suggests initially a happy family atmosphere, though we wonder if Eddie is over-protective of Catherine. There are undercurrents, however: of tension between Eddie and Beatrice, and of unnatural closeness between Eddie and Catherine. Catherine and Beatrice must persuade Eddie to allow Catherine to take her job; at last he agrees, but warns Catherine not to trust people because 'most people ain't people'. We then discover that Beatrice's cousins are coming to stay, which gives Eddie the chance to tell the tale of Vinny Bolzano. This is ironically prophetic of his own treachery later. Note the stage directions, also. Exits and entrances allow Miller to have different pairs in conversation. Catherine runs her hands down her dress to show it off, walks Eddie to his chair, and sits on her heels beside him. There are repeated references to the facial expressions of the characters. While Beatrice rebuts Eddie's charge ('You're the one is mad'), Catherine gives Eddie a cigar and lights it. The speech hints at the trouble in his marital relations, while the action indicates its cause (in films of an earlier period the gesture was often used to suggest sexual attraction or something deeper; here it is as if Eddie and Catherine play at being lovers).

Episode 2

Marco and Rodolpho arrive. Marco speaks simply of the poverty at home while Rodolpho, whose blond hair arouses surprise and amused comment, is exuberant in his stories of his singing and his plan to buy a motorbike. Rodolpho's singing of *Paper Doll* delights Catherine, who is already obviously attracted to him. Eddie sees with regret that Catherine is already slipping from him. The singing is the most obvious theatrical feature in this episode. Eddie's objection to it is really the expression of his fear of losing Catherine. Within minutes of the cousins' arrival Eddie begins 'more and more to address

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Marco only'. He asks Catherine: 'What happened to the coffee?' (to remind her of her duty; but her reply, 'got it on', annoys him, as she continues to hang on Rodolpho's words). Eddie objects to Catherine's high heels, so she changes her shoes, but he cannot object as she 'pours a spoonful of sugar' into Rodolpho's cup: we are reminded of her attentions in the previous scene to Eddie.

Episode 3

Eddie and Beatrice argue about Rodolpho. Eddie continually shifts his ground: when Beatrice reminds him of 'Whitey Balso', Eddie attacks Rodolpho's singing; when Beatrice says this may be normal in Italy, Eddie illogically asks why Marco does not sing. When Beatrice asks Eddie 'when am I gonna be a wife again?' we realize the strength of his desire for Catherine.

Mike and Louis joke about Rodolpho to Eddie. They are amused by his unconventional manner but do not agree quite with Eddie's defensive claim that he is funny. It seems to Eddie that Mike and Louis share his idea of Rodolpho's effeminacy but dare not say so directly. As the lovers return, Eddie insists on speaking alone with Catherine, trying to persuade her that Rodolpho is just 'bowin' to his passport'. Though her instincts tell her to trust Rodolpho her respect for Eddie makes this hard.

When Eddie leaves her with Beatrice to 'straighten her out', Beatrice does just this, but not in the way he hopes, as she explains to Catherine the need to become independent of Eddie, an idea later echoed by Rodolpho (Act Two) in his metaphor of the 'little bird'. It is here that Beatrice tells us how Catherine still behaves as she did when a child, walking around in her slip, entering the bathroom when Eddie is shaving, throwing herself at him when he comes home. Beatrice is not jealous by temperament but is mature enough to see the effect this has on a man. In theatrical terms we should note how movement into the street and back, as well as natural exits and entrances, allows Miller to achieve different groupings of characters to suit the dialogue, which dominates the episode.

Episode 4

This takes place in Alfieri's office; Eddie is less at ease in neutral territory. Eddie explains his case to Alfieri, who tries gently to suggest that his conclusions are far from reasonable. Alfieri tells Eddie of the only law which can help him, but he is not (yet) desperate enough to do so. Finally, Alfieri points out that Catherine 'wants to get married' but cannot marry him. This is the second time (coming after Beatrice's 'troubles') that Eddie has been given a hint of his improper desire. Again, he seems offended and puzzled, but dare not consider the idea further, as we can tell from the pause which follows Alfieri's ultimatum: 'I gave you my advice ... That's it.'

Episode 5

This episode leads to the climax with which the first act ends. Eddie feels he has lost face. He tries to hit back by his sarcastic comment about the 'surprises' which meet returning immigrant workers. Without taking offence, Marco politely points out that this does not happen. But Rodolpho's 'It's not so free' attracts a sarcastic response from Eddie. It is Catherine, not Rodolpho who takes offence, and puts on *Paper Doll* and insists that Rodolpho dance. This leads in turn to the boxing lesson and Marco's trick with the chair.

In this episode, the action dominates the dialogue. The three stages of action - dancing, boxing, chair-lifting - and the way in which Eddie, Catherine and Marco all see and react to what is going on in the scene make this a very theatrical episode. Eddie sees Rodolpho dancing away with his beloved; he tries to win her back with manly action while humiliating

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Rodolpho, but is in turn made ridiculous by Marco's action. Marco, who will not allow any harm to his family, neutralizes the one tactic (physical violence) Eddie can use on Rodolpho. The chair held 'like a weapon' over Eddie's head symbolizes his impending judgment and punishment, and anticipates the way in which Marco, rather than Rodolpho, is to become Eddie's chief adversary.

Episode 6

Alfieri's remark about the whisky prepares us for the appearance of the drunken Eddie. The set design allows us to see him before his confrontation with Catherine and Rodolpho. It prepares us for some outrage, but not perhaps for such an extreme incidence as occurs. Before it we see the only extended episode of tenderness and romantic love in the play (we know Catherine has spent time with Rodolpho but we have not seen them alone together, and this is the first time they have been together in the house).

From this mood of delicacy and tenderness (true love) we move to a shocking and violent parody of love, with overtones of incest and homosexual rape. Eddie's kissing Catherine and Rodolpho shocks a modern audience; in 1955 it was electrifying. The playwright's sense of theatre is shown in this use of contrast and action. The dialogue before Eddie's arrival confirms Rodolpho's maturity and love for Catherine. We learn of Catherine's near telepathic understanding of Eddie but cannot agree with her criticism of Beatrice.

Eddie's drunkenness might appear to mitigate his actions but does not really do so; rather, his loss of control enables him to show how he truly feels. And what we see disgusts us as much as it does Catherine. Perhaps he has drunk to summon up the bravado for what he is about to do. We might wonder why Marco does not do anything about the treatment of Rodolpho, but it seems he is not told of it (ALFIERI: 'I guess they didn't tell him'...EDDIE: 'I don't know...'). Eddie crows over the beaten Rodolpho, but his is a hollow and pathetic victory. In this episode the stage directions are of the greatest importance, even in little details such as Eddie's seeing 'pattern and cloth' on a table or Catherine's adjusting her dress 'under his gaze'. Even as Eddie laughs at Rodolpho, the young man stands 'with tears rolling down his face.'

Episode 7

In this brief episode, Alfieri counsels Eddie to no avail. Alfieri does not repeat his earlier comment on the only law which can help Eddie, but sees that desperation will lead him to betray Marco and Rodolpho, and repeatedly warns him against it. The 'darkness' into which he follows Eddie may symbolize Eddie's being in the dark morally and psychologically. The glowing of the phone booth clearly indicates in visual theatrical terms how the idea first occurs to Eddie, then becomes irresistible.

Episode 8

We do not know if Louis and Mike notice where Eddie has been. They might wonder what reason he has to use the phone. But after the arrest, the timing of the call should seem much more sinister, and will be circumstantial evidence to support Marco's accusation.

As Beatrice and Eddie argue about Eddie's conduct, we note that the audience shares with Eddie the knowledge that the immigration officers are about to arrive. Beatrice, ignorant of this, bitterly points out, but takes no pleasure in it, that Eddie has now 'got [his] respect'. When Eddie says, 'I done what to him?' he may betray what he has just done by his reaction. Beatrice means the kiss, of course, but Eddie may think for a split second that she has guessed what he has since done to Rodolpho.

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Eddie seems relaxed until he learns of Mrs. Dondero's other lodgers, Lipari's relatives. He is made anxious by a fear that he will be responsible for the betrayal of another family (as if he could be excused the treachery to his own, actually his wife's) and at the same time sees a way to throw off suspicion by alleging that Lipari has enemies who will betray him and thus land Marco and Rodolpho in trouble. He at once insists on moving these men out.

The set design again allows the audience to see how futile this is, as the immigration officers are already entering the building. We feel revulsion as Eddie invites Catherine to consider whether or not he has ever told her anything that was for her good. He has done this, for honourable motives, in the past, but he is now appealing to the trust he has so horribly betrayed.

Marco twice breaks free from the arresting officers: the first time, he faces Eddie and spits at him; the second time, in the street, he cries out his accusation of Eddie. The stage directions indicate the response of those around; one by one, they turn their backs on Eddie, thereby showing their readiness to believe the accusation. Eddie is left to shout defiant threats to Marco. We know that the accusation is fair, that Marco will not 'take that back', and that Eddie will not kill him.

Episode 9

In this brief episode, Alfieri counsels Marco. Though Eddie would die for such a betrayal in Sicily, Alfieri will only put up bail for Marco if he gives his word not to harm him. Unlike Eddie, Marco is 'an honourable man', who will keep his word. Although certain to be deported, Marco has the chance to work for five or six weeks, and Rodolpho, by marrying Catherine, will be able to stay. This makes the betrayal utterly futile. Moreover, the threat of deportation ensures that the marriage takes place at once. Marco agrees to Alfieri's request, in order to be able to attend his brother's wedding. He is reminded that strong though his hand is, it 'is not God' and 'only God makes justice'.

Episode 10

Beatrice is torn between loyalty to Catherine, whose wedding she feels a duty to attend, and to Eddie. She wishes to stand by Eddie, as all others have deserted him. Catherine calls him a rat, who bites and poisons and belongs in the garbage, but she is weeping as she says it. Rodolpho comes to warn Eddie of his brother's approach and vengeful intention, and also to propose reconciliation. Moved by generosity (and perhaps an understanding that his bride still loves Eddie) Rodolpho proposes a solution. He apologizes to Eddie and suggests that Marco may be placated if he can believe that Eddie and Rodolpho are friends now.

But Eddie has no interest in this offer. He calls Rodolpho 'a punk' and 'kid'. What he wants is his name, and only Marco, who has taken it, can return it. What he is asking is impossible: earlier, speaking of Vinny Bolzano, Eddie has said that you can more easily retrieve a million dollars 'that was stole than a word that you gave away'.

Now Beatrice suggests that what Eddie really wants is something quite different, but just as obviously unattainable: 'You want somethin' else...and you can never have her!' Eddie cannot admit this, but is driven by Beatrice's remark to a display of defiance. He demands that Marco retract his accusation and restore to him his good name and status in the community, without which his life is of no value. Marco calls Eddie an 'animal' and strikes

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him, at which Eddie pulls a knife on him. Marco seizes Eddie's arm as he lunges with the knife, and turns it back on him.

In this short episode we see the whole play recapitulated in some ways, as Eddie confronts in turn Beatrice, Catherine, Rodolpho, Beatrice again and Marco. Eddie is supported by the two women as he dies. He is killed by his own hand, an obvious metaphor for his self-destruction. All that remains is for Alfieri to explain how Eddie 'allowed himself to be wholly known'.

The interludes

The function of these is generally discussed above in the account of Alfieri's rôle. It can be noted briefly here that these are used to mark the divisions between the episodes, which may be hours or weeks apart, and to supply linking narrative or background details. Within each act the episodes and interludes give a structure to the narrative, while the latter also allow Alfieri in his rôle as chorus/commentator, to explain and interpret the action for the audience.

The play in performance

- To show your understanding of how the play should be a performance (not a book to read in class), explain and describe how you would present it for a given medium (stage, film, television or radio). You may do this for the play generally or for a specific episode.
- Comment on your ideas for costume, props, the set, lighting, music, sound FX (effects), casting, direction and anything else you think interesting or relevant.

A View from the Bridge onstage

Nicole De Sapia has sent this account of a production, in Maryland, USA, for which she was the dramaturg. It gives a clear sense of how the play might work in performance. You might like to think about the reasons for some of the choices Nicole made, and whether you would do likewise, or something different. I am grateful to Nicole for supplying these notes.

I was recently dramaturg for a production of *A View from the Bridge*. A dramaturg is someone who studies the literary aspects of a playscript and works with the director to make sure that the production is in keeping with the playwright's intentions. A dramaturg may do research on the play's period and the circumstances of its creation, give staging suggestions to the director, discuss the play's characters with the actors, write program notes, do translations, and give lectures about the play to the audience.

The performances of *A View from the Bridge* took place at Cedar Lane Stage in Bethesda, Maryland, USA. The theater has a relatively small stage, which is ideal for *A View from the Bridge*. The small stage gave the action a cramped feel - which conveyed, in physical terms, the unhealthy closeness that had developed between Eddie and Catherine.

At the same time, a sense of community was created by having the actors make some of their entrances from the back of the auditorium. This is how Marco and Rodolpho made their first entrance, and when Eddie made his fateful phone call, he was standing near a row of audience seats. The audience could clearly see his desperate facial expressions as he made the call; he looked like a man completely mastered by his emotions. The arrest of the immigrants also took place out in the audience; when Eddie shouted at Mike, Louis, and Lipari for abandoning him, he directly addressed the audience, making them the 'community'.

The actor who played Eddie in the production was smaller of physical stature than one usually imagines Eddie to be. This, and the fact that he emphasized Eddie's vulnerability in his portrayal, made the character unusually sympathetic. Consequently, his fate seemed a true tragedy. Rather than seeming like an incestuous 'heavy', this Eddie was a man who was not overly bright, but who had deep feelings that he could not completely understand, let alone control. His feelings for Catherine seemed like unusually strong love and concern, rather than like lust. Though certainly not incapable of violent emotion, this Eddie was basically a decent and loving man who – tragically – never really knew himself.

One thing that made this production of *A View from the Bridge* different from others is that the Act II scene involving Alfieri, Rodolpho, and Marco (when Marco is in the prison after his arrest) was performed partially in Italian. (So that the audience would be sure to understand what was being said, the English version of the line was usually repeated afterwards, if it was an important line.) I did the translation myself and taught the actors how to pronounce it. Doing the scene this way reminded the audience that all three of the characters in the scene – Alfieri, Marco, and Rodolpho – had a shared background, though Alfieri had been in America for a much longer time and had achieved respect and high standing in the community.

Overview and close-up

You cannot possibly write in great detail about everything in this play. Life (yours and your teachers') is too short. Try to balance general comment about the whole of the play, its broad themes, characters and relationships, with detailed and specific explanations of short episodes.

Finally, make a judgement

Give your opinion of the play - what you like or dislike about it. Try to be positive and to relate your comments closely to the detail of the play.

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A title for your work

There is no one perfect title, but the title you use should indicate what you have written about. At the most basic level, you might write about character, action, dramatic devices and structures in *A View from the Bridge*. If you were more ambitious, you might take as your title something like: How does Miller present Eddie Carbone as a tragic hero in *A View from the Bridge*? If you concentrate on how to present the play for performance, your title could reflect this – *A View from the Bridge* in performance.

Presenting your work

Theatre is a practical art - your work should recognize this. You may want to include illustrations, sketches, diagrams and plans, to show your ideas about the set, costume, lighting and so on.

And remember

It's a **play**. Refer to the **audience** not the **reader**. Do not refer to the **book** but to the **play, performance** or **production**. Make sure you spell **Arthur** and **author** in standard forms - and don't mix them up. Set out quotations conventionally, using quotation marks.