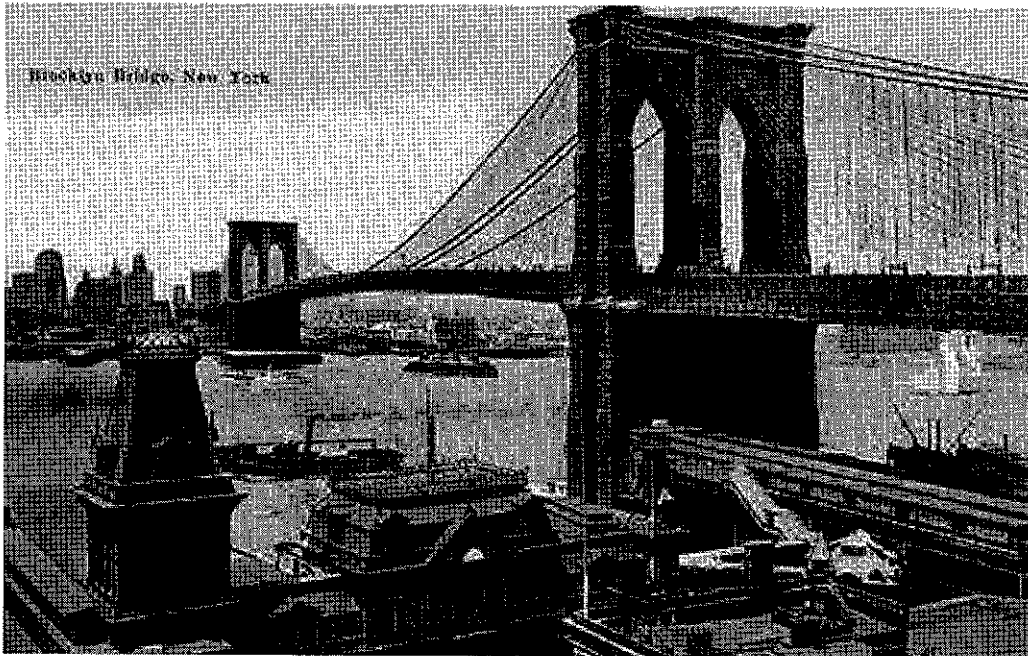


A View from the Bridge

By Arthur Miller



The Brooklyn Bridge over the East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn

From www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize

Before Reading

Background

In 1947, whilst researching the disappearance of a longshoreman (a worker who loads and unloads ships) who worked on the waterfront at Red Hook in Brooklyn, Arthur Miller heard the story of another longshoreman who informed the Immigration Bureau about two of his own relatives, to try to stop one of them marrying his niece. *A View from the Bridge* is therefore based on a true story.

At the time the play was written, in 1955, Italy was still feeling the economic effects of World War II and was consequently a poor country. With minimal job prospects, many people emigrated to America in search of work. Dockyard owners took advantage of this arrival of illegal immigrants, since they could get cheap labour until the immigrants had paid for their fare over from Italy. After that, the immigrants often had to look elsewhere for work.

Arthur Miller worked in the Brooklyn navy yards for almost two years and thus experienced for himself the daily lives of the Italian workers and witnessed their struggle to compete for jobs every day, always at the mercy of the hiring boss. Clearly, this system was both humiliating and open to widespread corruption – as if the usual rules of American society did not apply there.

- **Activity**

In pairs, research Italy's history during and after World War II which led to the arrival of so many immigrants into America. Explain the 'American Dream' that no doubt attracted so many immigrants.

How well do I know the story?

Act 1

Act 1 is broken down here into manageable episodes. Working with a partner, fill in the missing gaps from memory, without referring to the play.

- *Alfieri addresses the audience as narrator.*
- Eddie both compliments and criticises _____.
- Eddie tells Beatrice her cousins _____ and then hears news of Catherine's _____.
- Eddie warns Catherine and Beatrice _____.
- *Alfieri briefly narrates again.*
- Marco and Rodolpho arrive - Catherine seems attracted _____, who sings _____.
- *Alfieri narrates.*
- Eddie is critical of _____ to Beatrice and then discusses him with _____.
- Catherine and Rodolpho arrive home late from _____.
- Eddie and Catherine discuss Rodolpho - he tells her the immigrant only wants _____.
- Beatrice advises Catherine _____.
- *Alfieri narrates* and then becomes part of the action as Eddie visits him and seeks advice.
- Eddie voices his discontent to Rodolpho then invites him to _____ - Eddie hits Rodolpho.
- Marco challenges Eddie to _____.

Act 2

Now note down the main events in Act 2, leaving gaps for your partner to fill in (as in the example above of Act 1).

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Characters

Use the following questions (making sure each answer is supported by quotations) to help you build a character study of the following two characters:

Eddie

Act 1

1. 'Where you goin' all dressed up?... What happened to your hair?' Are Eddie's remarks to Catherine compliments or criticisms? Explain your answer.

2. What do Eddie's comments on Catherine's current behaviour suggest about his relationship with her?

3. To what extent does Eddie send Catherine mixed messages by his contradictory language, telling her on the one hand 'You're a baby' and on the other hand 'You're getting to be a big girl now'?

4. What is revealed about Eddie's character from the following?

- Beatrice's comment: 'I'm just afraid if it don't turn out good you'll be mad at me'.

- His pattern of three questions: 'What's all this about? Where's she goin'?...What's goin' on?'

- His negative language: 'No-no...not wonderful...never get nowheres...no job'.

- On debating Catherine's job: 'That ain't what I wanted, though.'

5. What sort of relationship does Eddie have with his wife?

6. Eddie directly calls Catherine a variety of 'affectionate' terms, such as 'Katie...kid...a baby...a big girl...Madonna [i.e. the Virgin Mary]...Garbo' – discuss how each one gives a different view of Catherine in his eyes.

7. To what extent does Alfieri try to offer a balanced view of Eddie's character?

Now discuss the following issues about Eddie's character, either with a partner or in a group:

8. When the immigrants arrive, what do the stage directions increasingly make clear about which immigrant Eddie directs his questions to? What does that therefore already suggest about Eddie and Rodolpho?
9. What do you think was the real reason Eddie stopped Rodolpho's song? Likewise, Eddie only remarks on Catherine's heels when she has been wearing them for a while. Why does he choose this precise moment to criticise them?
10. Although he never actually says it, Eddie hints on several occasions that Rodolpho is a homosexual – in pairs, examine the 'evidence' he gives to both Beatrice and Alfieri and discuss whether you think he is right.
11. In Alfieri's office, the lawyer seems to hit a raw nerve with Eddie: '[*furiously*] What're you talkin' about, marry me!' How far does his reaction to Alfieri's rhetorical question surprise you?
12. What does Eddie's suggestion to spar with Rodolpho reveal about his perception of masculinity?
13. At the end of the Act 'Eddie's *grin vanishes as he absorbs his [Marco's] look*'. What has Eddie realised in this moment?

Act 2

14. What, in your opinion, does Eddie's kiss to Catherine and then Rodolpho mean and what is its importance in directly leading to the climax of the play?
15. How are Eddie's words to Catherine, 'Don't make me do nuttin', Catherine', characteristic of his behaviour towards her?
16. Discuss how Eddie's words and body language betray him to Beatrice and Catherine.
17. Despite his guilt, how does Eddie portray himself as a victim?
18. At the end of the play, to what extent does Eddie deserve our sympathies?

Act 1

1. What do the following suggest about Catherine's character at the start of the play?

- Her persistent repetition of the question 'You like it?' to Eddie

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- Her body language '[*She sits on her heels beside him.*']

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- She is '[*almost in tears because he disapproves.*']

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2. How does Beatrice back up Catherine's case for taking the job?

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3. 'Stay there! I'll get it for you...Here! I'll light it for you!' To what extent do you think Catherine tries too hard to please Eddie and is therefore partly responsible for his possessiveness towards her?

4. How far are we surprised by Catherine's question to Rodolpho regarding his marital status, bearing in mind her earlier focus on him when he first arrived?

5. How does Catherine react to Eddie's suggestion that Rodolpho only wants to marry her to gain American citizenship?

6. How important is Beatrice in Catherine's development into womanhood?

Act 2

1. Although we recognise that Catherine is maturing, symbolised in her decision to start a physical relationship with Rodolpho, in what ways is she still the same girl we met at the start of the play? Look at the following to help you answer this question.

- How do her words to Rodolpho, 'I don't know anything', link back to her words to Beatrice in Act 1 during their talk about growing up?

- Why does she say '**I think** I have to get out of here, Eddie...**I think** I can't stay...' rather than 'I have to get out of here...I can't stay...'?

2. In pairs, discuss how Catherine's language and attitude towards Eddie completely changes after the immigrants are arrested.

3. What is Catherine's reaction to Beatrice's revelation: 'You want somethin' else, Eddie, and you can never have her!' and to what extent do you think she has known this all along, but chosen not to believe it?

Themes

Love and Jealousy

1. What different kinds of love are portrayed in the play?

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

2. To what extent does Eddie's protectiveness towards Catherine go further than the natural concerns of an uncle?

Homosexuality

Although Eddie fails to directly say why he dislikes Rodolpho, his constant references to the immigrant's effeminate manners make his opinion clear. What is the viewpoint of each of the following characters on this topic?

Beatrice

Alfieri

Louis

Mike

Fate

The idea that life is predestined and inevitable is introduced by Alfieri the narrator as he warns us of Eddie's destiny at the start, 'powerless as I...watched it run its bloody course', and continues to do so during the course of the play.

In pairs, find two more of the narrator's references to Eddie's fate, explaining the importance of each.

Law, Justice and Betrayal

1. What type of law does Eddie represent, in comparison to Marco?
2. How important is the Italian Code of Honour to the immigrants and how does Eddie (remembering his cultural roots are also from Italy) go against it?
3. Explore the different betrayals we witness.

What other themes can you find in the play?

Language, Style and Structure

Language

- **Grammar**

The English spoken by the characters, with the exception of Alfieri, is to a large extent informal, abbreviated and grammatically incorrect, for example, Beatrice's use of 'brung' instead of 'brought'.

1. In pairs, find three other examples of their informal way of speaking.

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

2. Take these three examples and for each one write in the space below how each one reminds us of their cultural roots.

(i)

.....

(ii)

.....

(iii)

.....

- **Negativity**

Eddie's language is often negative as he is in conflict with several characters at various points in the play. Look carefully at the language he uses, his use of questions to answer questions and his negative body language. Write five examples of his negativity.

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.....

• **Euphemism**

1. This is used by Beatrice when referring to the physical side of her relationship with Eddie – can you find the reference?

2. Why does she use this euphemism, since elsewhere she does not have trouble telling Eddie how she feels about other issues?

• **Song lyrics**

1. Why are the lyrics of 'Paper Doll' ironic, i.e. to whom could they so easily refer?

2. How are Eddie's words of advice to Catherine earlier on echoed in the lyrics?

Irony

Explain the irony of the following, taken from Act 1:

1. 'If everybody keeps his mouth shut...' Eddie.

2. 'You're an angel!' Beatrice to Eddie.

3. Eddie advising Catherine not to say a word about the illegal immigrants.

• **Imagery**

Imagery is used by several characters to enrich or highlight their descriptions, for example, notice how Eddie uses onomatopoeia to mock Catherine walking in her high heels 'clack, clack, clack' in Act 1.

1. What does the simile he uses 'The heads are turnin' like windmills' suggest?

2. Rodolpho also uses imagery, especially when describing his life in Italy. Find one example and explain its effectiveness.

Style

- **Use of Narrator**

Alfieri's role is a complex one, as he not only directs the action, but also takes part in it.

1. The playwright uses him to open the play: how does he immediately draw us in as an audience?

2. He introduces the recurring idea of 'settling for half', which opens and closes the play, bringing it full circle. What do you think he means by this?

- **Symbols**

What do Catherine's high heels represent in Eddie's mind? What other symbols can you find?

• **Theatrical devices**

(a) Dramatic tension/Dramatic irony

- (i) How dramatic are the beginnings and endings of each Act?
Complete the following table:

	Beginning of Act	End of Act
Act One		
Act Two		

- (ii) Where else is the drama heightened in the play?

- (iii) What techniques does the playwright use to sustain the drama during these periods?

- (iv) Dramatic irony (when the audience is aware of something a character(s) on stage is not), is used to maximum effect in Act 2 – what examples can you find?

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

(b) Setting

- (i) Since most of the action takes place in Eddie's apartment, what advantage does that give him over the other characters?

- (ii) What other settings are referred to via the characters' words?

1 _____
2 _____
3 _____

(c) Stage Directions

How do these add to our understanding of the action, characters and the way characters interact with each other? Give two examples.

1. _____

2. _____

Structure

1. Why do you think the playwright does not divide the acts into scenes?

2. How are events linked in both acts?

Exam Practice

In pairs, make brief notes on how to answer each question before comparing ideas with the rest of the class. Then practise answering a question under timed conditions in class.

1. By the end of the play, do you find yourself sympathising with Eddie or criticising him? Give full reasons for your views.
2. What do you regard as the central theme in this play? Give full reasons for your answer with close reference to the text.
3. How important is Alfieri's role both as a narrator and a character in the play?
4. What different versions of masculinity are offered by the three main male characters, Eddie, Marco and Rodolpho?