A View from the Bridge
by Arthur Miller
Teaching notes prepared for VATE members
Section 1.
An introduction to A View from the Bridge

The author and his context

Arthur Miller’s *A View from the Bridge* was first conceived in 1955, six years after *Death of a Salesman* and three years after *The Crucible*, a play which attempted to address the issue of McCarthyism through the dramatisation of the Salem witch trials. Both these earlier plays enjoyed spectacular success. *Death of a Salesman* was produced more times in the twentieth century than any other play except *Waiting for Godot*. Miller wrote *The Crucible* in response to the investigation into the political activities of writers and artists by the House Committee on Un-American Activities chaired by Senator Joe McCarthy. Miller was one of hundreds of writers, directors and artists –such as Charlie Chaplin and Paul Robeson– whose reputations and careers were attacked at the time.

Miller is not simply known as a successful liberal playwright. He is also famous as the husband of Marilyn Monroe, who married him after leaving baseball star Joe DiMaggio. Under Miller’s guidance, Monroe underwent psychoanalysis and enrolled at Lee Strasberg’s Method School of Acting (where people such as Marlon Brando, Paul Newman, Eva Marie-Saint, and in later years, Al Pacino also trained). Miller tried to help Monroe gain success as a character actress and took her to England in 1956 where she met the British acting establishment and starred in the film *The Prince and the Showgirl* under the direction of Laurence Olivier.

Miller and Monroe were part of a community of writers and actors in New York, which included the director Elia Kazan, who directed both the plays of Miller and of Tennessee Williams. Kazan went on to make the film of *A Streetcar named Desire* and *On the Waterfront*, the film that earned Brando his first academy award. Elia Kazan and Miller had an intense creative relationship that saw its greatest achievement in *Death of a Salesman*.

In American terms, Miller was an activist who was a political liberal. In the U.S.A., the term liberal is given to someone on the left of politics. In the 1950s, the country was going through a strongly conservative period as a generation of Americans tried to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of World War Two. Except in popular music, America was a conservative ‘white’ country, politically and culturally: neither the blacks, American Indians nor the many migrant communities were adequately represented in films or in television; a woman’s role was as a homemaker only; gay rights were non-existent. Yet, opposition to this conservatism was stirring. In 1954, *The Brown versus Board* decision in the U.S. Supreme Court paved the way for nine black students under the protection of federal troops to enrol at an all white school in Little Rock, Arkansas. In New York, the privileged liberal-thinking writers and artists believed they had a role in changing society for the better.
Central concerns

*A View from the Bridge*, like *West Side Story*, is about a particular part of the city of New York, a part the white middle-class audiences would not normally visit: ‘Red Hook…the slum that faces the bay on the seaward side of Brooklyn Bridge. This is the gullet of New York swallowing the tonnage of the world’ (12). It is as if we, the middle-class audience, view the domestic tragedy in Red Hook from the bridge. We are distant, safely distant, and our view is mediated for us by Alfieri, an Italian lawyer, someone with our values, someone we can recognize, yet someone who has links to, and sympathies with, the community we will soon get to know. Alfieri places the play in context for us. It is a play about ‘the petty troubles of the poor,’ but it also has links with a Roman past: ‘In some Caesar’s year …another lawyer…sat there as powerless as I and watched it run its bloody course’ (12). We are meant to see that this play has inevitability about it - perhaps a tragic inevitability.

Miller shows a character who is unable to adapt to the changing realities of his life because he cannot admit to his possessiveness, and his unconsciously sexual passion for his niece. Throughout the play Miller documents Eddie’s personal difficulties and the social isolation that have led to the development of his passion for Catherine and his inevitable fall from grace. Miller suggests a number of personal causes for Eddie’s downfall –his inability to speak to his wife, his envy of Rodolfo, even some unconscious homophobia. Yet, Miller also wants his audience to consider the narrowness of Eddie’s existence as a migrant in a community preoccupied with survival, his fear of New York, his lack of education, his poverty and its attendant sense of failure (Catherine will be earning more money than he will).

The play is also an exploration of the different struggles of migrants, struggles which are in a sense a key part of the history of both the USA and of Australia: it is part of the condition of these families that their members are highly dependent on each other; that the bonds between them are intense and rigid, that they lead lives full of stress and danger; and that conflict between them is passionate and violent. By betraying Marco and Rodolfo, Eddie forces the others into sudden irrevocable choices that result in the destruction of the family.

Miller is interested in the part sexuality plays in Eddie’s downfall. Eddie is unable to speak to Beatrice about his sexual and emotional difficulties; he speaks insultingly to Marco about the loyalty of women in Italy; he idealises Catherine, calling her Madonna and believes Rodolfo is tricking her; he ascribes the worst possible motives to Rodolfo, connecting in his own mind, base motives with homosexuality. Eddie suffers a great deal, but his actions are mean, treacherous and destructive.

Yet Miller presents Eddie with compassion and clearly intends us to see him as tragic. There are a number of scenes in the play, which show him suffering, and others which show other people loving him. He is seen as someone who is capable of acting generously. It is clear that his act in inviting Marco and Rodolfo to stay is generous. At the beginning he struggles with the idea of Catherine going to work, but is able to accept it. It is his destiny however to have a destiny out of the ordinary. Eddie can be seen as someone who has been challenged beyond his resources, but also someone who seeks out his own destructive end.
Section 3. Running sheet
Act 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Introduction by Alfieri</strong></th>
<th>He explains why he still practises in Red Hook – occasionally a case occurs that has an ancient, purifying quality…</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(13-14) Eddie comes home from work and sees Catherine.</td>
<td>Eddie complains at the responses Catherine gets from men.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(15-17) Eddie tells Beatrice her cousins have arrived.</td>
<td>Beatrice is overcome with emotion – Eddie’s comments are sardonic. Yet he shows he cares.</td>
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<td>(17-21) Catherine and Beatrice tell Eddie about the job.</td>
<td>Eddie totally opposes. Beatrice tries to convince him by rational argument. Eddie only responds when she becomes angry.</td>
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<td>(22-25) The family discuses the danger of harbouring illegal migrants.</td>
<td>Eddie speaks authoritatively about the boy who betrayed his relative while grieving for the ‘loss’ of his niece. We see that Catherine loves Eddie but that all is not well between Eddie and Beatrice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. (26) <strong>Alfieri’s comment</strong></td>
<td>He describes Eddie’s life with a “biblical” simplicity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(26-33) Marco and Rodolfo arrive.</td>
<td>We see Marco is a serious man who gives ‘proper’ deference to Eddie. Rodolfo is carefree and theatrical. Eddie seems concerned about Rodolfo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(34) <strong>Alfieri’s comment.</strong></td>
<td>He is underlining the simple but profound change in Eddie’s life from uneventful to one in which there is trouble.</td>
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<td>(34-36) Eddie and Beatrice talk while Eddie waits for Catherine and Rodolfo to come home from the movies.</td>
<td>Beatrice rejects Eddie’s fears about Catherine. Eddie is unable to explain why there has been a cessation in sexual relations</td>
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<td>(37-38) Louis and Mike speak to Eddie about Rodolfo.</td>
<td>Louis and Mike are delighted with Rodolfo but Eddie is troubled by their talk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(38-42) Rodolfo and Catherine return from the movies.</td>
<td>Eddie tries to convince Catherine that Rodolfo is using her, but she is incensed by his claims and his crude descriptions.</td>
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<td>(42-44) Beatrice explodes at Eddie then speaks to Catherine about changing her behaviour.</td>
<td>Beatrice shows that she already has an idea that Eddie has feelings for Catherine of which he is not aware.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(45-49) <strong>Eddie speaks to Alfieri.</strong></td>
<td>Eddie seeks to have his views of Rodolfo endorsed and to corral the law into stopping Rodolfo from marrying Catherine.</td>
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<td>(50-58)</td>
<td>Dinner in the apartment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(59-63)</td>
<td>Catherine and Rodolfo are alone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(63-65)</td>
<td>Eddie arrives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(65)</td>
<td>Alfieri’s comment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(65-67)</td>
<td>Eddie sees Alfieri a second time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(67)</td>
<td>Eddie betrays Marco and Rodolfo to the immigration authorities.</td>
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<td>(67-73)</td>
<td>Eddie and Beatrice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(73-77)</td>
<td>The arrival of Immigration Officers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(77-80)</td>
<td>Prison.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(80-81)</td>
<td>Before the wedding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(81-85)</td>
<td>The fight.</td>
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</tbody>
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In *A View from the Bridge*, the protagonist, Eddie Carbone, falls from a position of respect in his community to that of an outcast, whose only refuge lies in death. This is a painful, poignant play, as Eddie's fall is presented as inevitable. The play resembles a tragedy in that the protagonist falls from a position of respect to one of calamity. Yet, unlike the heroes in the great Greek and Shakespearean tragedies, Eddie is a little man, who is on the edge of U.S. society rather than at its centre, and who is remarkable, not in the greatness of his own tragic self-realisation, but in his determination to live out his vision of the world, even at the cost of everything he has.

The original audience for the play were white middle-class intellectual and professional people who would have been drawn from the comfortable areas of Manhattan, and who would not normally have visited that part of Brooklyn where the play is set. Miller wanted to write a tragedy, but knew that life in modern America is essentially un-tragic, based as it is on the questionable virtues of pragmatism and compromise. He found, in the true story of a longshoreman in the Brooklyn wharf suburb of Red Hook, a tale where pragmatism and compromise had no place (www.sparknotes.com/drama/viewbridge/context.html).

The characters are longshoremen, (wharf labourers) and their families. They are unglamorous, unromantic and very narrow in their views of and experience of life. Miller needed the character of Alfieri as a ‘bridge’ to the life of Red Hook. The audience is once removed from the characters. We ‘view from the bridge’ and rely on the mediating figure of Alfieri, the migrant lawyer who is from both the characters’ world and our world, to show us the significance of Eddie’s feelings and actions. Like most of modern America, Alfieri is ‘quite civilised’, quite American. He “settles for half” (13).

Alfieri appreciates the community in which he lives. He refers to the people of Red Hook as ‘we’. Yet he sees it, not just as an unglamorous place, but also as a place where history manifests itself. He, and by extension, Arthur Miller, want us to see Eddie’s story as an elemental expression of passions that are always present, but that can no longer find expression in civilised life.

Yet, while the story is, in some sense, an ancient one, Miller also provides us with recognisable characters who are motivated by feelings that we all share. Eddie is not just a tragic figure: he exists as a second-generation migrant in a modern society and experiences social and economic pressures similar to many people around the world, including Australians. While he has achieved economic security and a degree of comfort that Marco can only wonder about, he is, by American standards, poor. Eddie tells Marco that he could earn ‘thirty, forty a week over the twelve months of the year’ (29). Presumably, that is all he can earn, too. Catherine will start on ‘fifty dollars a week’ 18 Catherine’s desire ‘to fix up the whole house’ 21 is an expression of an aspiration Eddie has given up on, that of improving his position in the new country. Because he has not had the education he needs to move out of Red Hook, Eddie has ‘settled’ for life and instead has pinned his hopes on Catherine’s future success. ‘I broke my back payin’ her stenography lessons so she could go out and meet a better class of people’ (70).

Eddie has ‘settled’ in another way, also. He has decided not to move out of Red Hook and views anywhere else with suspicion. He does not want Catherine to work near the navy yards because the plumbers are ‘practically longshoremen’. He does not want Rodolfo to take Catherine to Times Square: ‘It’s full of tramps over there’ (38). His answer to Beatrice, when she says ‘And I was never even in Staten Island’ is ‘you
didn’t miss nothin’ (50). Eddie lives in New York with the brooding suspicion of a peasant.

Unlike Catherine, Rodolfo, Marco and Beatrice, Eddie does not enjoy life and does not want new experiences. Essentially, he wants everything to stay the same. The problem is, that Catherine is growing up. Miller suggests that as the play begins, his relationship with Catherine affords him a pleasure that he cannot acknowledge to himself. Catherine takes an artless pleasure in greeting him, hugging him, waiting on him and he is touched by her youthful affection and desire to impress him with her beauty as any daughter would want to do to her father. She is, however, not his daughter, but his niece, and as Beatrice says to Catherine, ‘Sometimes you throw yourself at him like you was twelve years old’. There is some evidence that Catherine is, unconsciously, making up for what she sees as the coldness of Beatrice.

The problem for Eddie is that he has feelings for Catherine that he cannot acknowledge to himself. Apart from idealising her (‘You’re the Madonna type’ 20), all he can do is to complain to her about the way she walks: ‘The heads are turning like windmills’ (14). While this is a colourful expression, the element of exaggeration in it suggests anxiety and buried desire. Eddie seems not to be able to express any feelings directly except indignation and anger. What he does instead is to use colourful exaggerations and expressions such as ‘the heebie jeebies’ (34), which express emotion but do not help Eddie, name his feeling for himself. The consequence is that Eddie cannot reflect or admit to himself whenever he is wrong, unreasonable or dishonest, and his feelings remain buried. The arrival of Rodolfo awakens in Eddie feelings of envy and desire for which he has no words. Rodolfo is bold, full of himself, attractive and flamboyant. Whereas Eddie seems scarred by life, Rodolfo seems untouched by it. He is eager for new experiences and when he is alone with Catherine, his heterosexual desires are obvious. Eddie seems disturbed by all things sexual and in his interview with Alfieri his sexual jealousy of Rodolfo is revealed: ‘he takes and puts his filthy hands on her like a goddam thief’ (49).

The two references he makes to Rodolfo touching Catherine indicate how much he is suffering and how intense are his sexual fantasies. Eddie cannot see the incongruity in someone who ‘ain’t right,’ ‘putting his filthy hands’ on Catherine. Eddie has no word for homosexuality, but his actions in kissing both Rodolfo and Catherine suggest how confused he is about sexual matters and how unable he is to voice the conflicts that torment him.

Yet in spite of his actions and the pain and confusion that attend them, Miller is able to make us feel that Eddie matters and that his death is tragic. He does this in three ways. Firstly, Eddie never loses his sense of outrage over what has happened to him. Secondly, Miller invests Marco with simple dignity so that we see how seriously Eddie has broken the ancient code of loyalty. Finally, Miller uses the character of Beatrice to both love Eddie and to confront him with the truth.

Marco must fight Eddie because he has ruined Marco’s hopes. For Marco, life is simple –the poverty he experiences is much more serious than anything Eddie has experienced. Marco is struggling to feed his family and he has broken American law to come there. He is a serious person of simple but profound loyalties. His suffering and moving expressions of gratitude give him a special dignity in the play. When Eddie betrays him, Marco sees the ‘crime’ in ancient terms and he does not wish to settle for half.

Beatrice is the only character who continually confronts Eddie with the truth. Unlike Eddie, most of the time, Beatrice is realistic, generous and is capable of saying the truth as she sees it. That she has become colder to Eddie is borne out by Catherine,
who criticises her for not anticipating Eddie’s needs and feelings. The cause of the change in Beatrice is only sketched, but perhaps all three members of the family were struggling with Catherine’s growth into womanhood. She herself claims that it is Eddie who changed. Beatrice is loyal to Eddie and chooses to stay with him instead going to the wedding. Beatrice is capable of self-knowledge, and has the courage to tell Eddie the truth about the cause of his distress. She places a value on Eddie, by loving him even though it means she will have no independence or freedom of expression for herself. She tells him the truth to save his life. Eddie, however, cannot even begin to reflect on what she has told him. At the end, nothing can help him except the arrival of Marco.

The play leaves us uncertain about whether Eddie’s death is accidental or not. Eddie seems freed by the opportunity for a public fight. He seems to relish the opportunity to represent himself as a wronged man to the people he addresses as a wronged man. The fight seems to give back to Eddie the dignity he has lost, as he joins with Marco in being a man again. Marco’s notion of right and wrong allows Eddie to see himself in the simple traditional terms he understands, and for that, he is even prepared to die.
Characterisation

**Eddie**

Eddie Carbone is a simple, second generation Italian migrant who lives in a narrow community of poor people who look to America and its sense of unlimited possibilities as their hope for the future. For Eddie, however, the search is over. Something has happened to Eddie. He is familiar with poverty and struggle and as the play opens he has no expectations for himself. He is clearly a good man, having taken the responsibility for Catherine’s upbringing. As the play opens, we see him taking on another responsibility –that of illegal guardian of his wife’s family. Eddie can even be magnanimous about Catherine’s starting work. These responsibilities are in keeping with his traditional role of head of the house and Eddie’s sense of himself is not challenged by this generosity.

What is noticeable immediately is his inability to express any tender or painful feelings directly to anybody. He announces the arrival of Marco and Rodolfo as if he is talking about the weather. He is unable to speak to Beatrice about his feelings for her and does not see that his closeness to Catherine is a result of his difficulties with Beatrice, with whom he has had no children.

Eddie is not a happy man. He can only join in family conversations on his own terms. He takes refuge in a cynical toughness of expression that allows him to present himself as worldly and aware of evil, but in reality he is simply closed to the enjoyment of life. Unlike Beatrice, he seems to lack imagination. He seems uninterested in the stories of Marco and Rodolfo and can only see New York as a place of danger: ‘You didn’t miss nothin’ (50).

The happiness of Rodolfo and Catherine challenges Eddie’s sense of himself. He has neither Rodolfo’s talents nor his capacity for enjoyment. He also has no capacity to explore his own motives and feelings. All he has is a sense of himself as the head of a family with a reputation to uphold. Tragically, his desperation leads him to betray his community, but never admit to himself that he has done so. He has a powerful sense that he has been wronged, but all that has happened is that he has been faced with the reality that Catherine loves someone else. Eddie can only yearn for an ending where he can regain a traditional sense of his own dignity –death.

- How does Alfieri describe Eddie? Do you agree with his view?
- In which scenes do we see Eddie showing understanding of or empathy towards someone else?
- What are Eddie’s views on marriage?
- What do we observe about Eddie’s feelings for Catherine?
- Is there any evidence that Catherine really likes Eddie?

**Alfieri**

Alfieri presents civilised life as a life where one settles disputes according to law, and law necessarily limits everyone’s scope and opportunity for action. In a civilised world an individual’s feelings may be important, but they are never of absolute importance. One denies oneself the opportunity for complete self-expression because one accepts that the greater good is served by one’s submission to the dictates of civilised life. So maturity is a compromise, and one denies oneself the ecstasy of revenge, for
example. Alfieri is obviously intelligent and utterly realistic, but this intelligence and realism make him always aware of where he comes from. Part of him is nostalgic for a simpler, more passionate, more absolute way of living, and in his practice he seems to come in contact with it through people like Eddie.

Alfieri comments on the events of the play. He is a recognisable, comfortable, educated and urbane American and as such has authority with the audience. He expresses opinions and judgments about Eddie and the unfolding events, and these opinions and judgments lend significance to the events of the play, but his emotional responses, both as a participant, and as a character, are even more important. He guides us in our responses. He introduces the possibility of compassion as a response to these events—a possibility that Beatrice can imagine as well—so that what could be a grubby, ignominious tale is elevated to a much higher level of significance.

• Why does Miller introduce Alfieri into the play?
• What would the play be like if Alfieri was not present?
• Do you think the presence of Alfieri heightens or reduces the intensity of the play?
• How does Alfieri speak to Eddie during their first interview?
• What do you feel about Alfieri? Does he annoy or frustrate you?

Beatrice

Beatrice is in a relationship with someone who views marriage in strictly traditional terms: the husband is the head of the house; the wife has to remain loyal to the husband at all costs; the wife is not to question anything the husband does or says. These are clearly difficult strictures under which to live, but Beatrice manages. When Eddie makes his comment about Staten Island ‘You didn’t miss nothin’ (50), it becomes clear that he has not allowed her to go anywhere. Yet she still loves him. She has a strength, a resilience and a capacity to enjoy life that Eddie clearly lacks. She also has had long experience in handling Eddie, so she knows how to approach him to tell him about Catherine’s job opportunity.

Beatrice is grateful to Eddie for taking in her cousins. She also wants Eddie to enjoy the gratitude they all feel for him. What she cannot understand is Eddie’s objections to Catherine’s taking the job. She is very angry with Eddie and her anger sways him to accept the inevitable. Eddie’s objections offend her common sense. She struggles to understand them and then rejects them. Beatrice has settled in her life for much less than half and loves Eddie, but she is also aware of something in Eddie that is not responsive to rational discussion. In the duration of the play, she grows in understanding so that she is able, at the end, to voice the truth to Eddie and to accept responsibility for what has happened. Her dignity and stature at the end of the play help us see Eddie’s tragedy in all its poignancy.

• How does Beatrice speak to Eddie when she wants him to accept that Catherine will leave school?
• How does Beatrice respond to Marco and Rodolfo’s stories of their adventures?
• Is there any evidence that Beatrice can reflect on her own feelings and past actions?
• Is Beatrice capable of enjoying others’ successes?
• What evidence is there that Beatrice has mixed feelings about Catherine?
• Is it correct to say Beatrice is wise? Why or why not?
Catherine
At the beginning of the play, Catherine is young, carefree and excited about the future. She speaks easily to Eddie and has a real affection for him. Her gratitude and loyalty to him finds expression in her desire to refurnish their house. She appears artless, trusting and flirtatious towards Eddie, who speaks to her like a strict but loving father. Sadly, Eddie is a little too solicitous for her and seems too concerned about her capacity to draw admiring glances. Beatrice comments on her lack of restraint in her daily contact with Eddie. Eddie and Catherine have developed an intimacy that in some way replaces intimacy in Eddie’s marriage.

The play does not do much more than hint at the causes of the failure of Eddie’s and Beatrice’s marriage, but we know that Eddie is rigid and humourless, and that Beatrice is candid and passionate in expressing her feelings to Eddie. Catherine complains that Beatrice seems not to be able to, or doesn’t care to anticipate Eddie’s needs. Catherine is passionate in expressing her indignation at what she sees is Beatrice’s neglect of Eddie, but apparently has not noticed any thing in Eddie’s behaviour that might have alienated Beatrice.

Like many young people, she finds it difficult to grasp the fact that not everyone experiences the world as she does, and is as excited and happy as she is. She is utterly wounded by Eddie’s cynical assessment of Rodolfo's motives, and completely rejects Eddie when she realises he has reported Rodolfo and Marco. Her rejection of Eddie is sharply contrasted with Beatrice’s decision not to go to the wedding.

• Is there any evidence that Catherine is anything more than an artless teenager?
• Why does Eddie like Catherine so much?
• What is the nature of his feelings for her?
• How much of his feelings are those of a father-figure?
• Is there any evidence that Catherine idealises Eddie?
• What does she want from Eddie when she falls in love with Rodolfo?
• Why is she so hurt by Eddie’s claim about Rodolfo’s motives?

Marco
Rodolfo and Marco come to America to escape the poverty of post-war Italy. For Marco, this is a golden opportunity to feed his wife and children. Marco is a simple man, whose life and personality are totally focussed on his role as a father and provider. When he arrives at Eddie’s house, he shows respect to Eddie rather than to Beatrice, offering to leave as soon as Eddie says he must. He is seen both by Eddie and the other workers as a strong man and an excellent and very serious worker.

His affection for his family is obvious and his loyalty to them and to Rodolfo is strong. Perhaps it is possible to say that more than anyone else in the play, Marco’s personality is defined by these loyalties. He is not reflective or articulate, but in all his actions, he expresses himself with a simple directness that is both dignified and finally, terrifying. After Eddie has punched Rodolfo, Marco does not verbally threaten Eddie – he simply stands above him with a chair in his hand, a gesture that is all the more frightening because it is made in silence. When we hear that Marco has been praying in the church, we know that he is coming for revenge, because for him revenge is the natural consequence of Eddie’s betrayal.

• What do Eddie and Marco have in common and how are they different?
• What is Marco’s reaction when Eddie jokes about the wives back in Italy?
• How does this incident help us to clarify the difference between the two men?
• Why is Marco important for our perception of Eddie?
• What has Eddie lost that Marco still has?
Rodolfo
Rodolfo is the opposite of Marco in that he has no responsibilities, but instead wants to enjoy the experience of America to the fullest. Also, unlike Marco, he is blessed with artistic skills, a sunny disposition and an innate capacity to take enjoyment from life at all times. Miller makes clear to the audience that everyone likes and enjoys Rodolfo, everyone that is, except Eddie. His fellow workers, Beatrice and Catherine, are all excited by him, as if his spontaneity allows them to experience the hope they keep locked inside them. Such freedom is mortally dangerous to Eddie, whose sense of himself depends on rigidly defined relationships, where everyone’s behaviour is totally predictable.

Rodolfo’s sexuality and fiery independence is given expression in the scene where he is alone with Catherine. Far from being effeminate, he is on the point of taking Catherine to bed when Eddie interrupts them.

Rodolfo represents the unexpressed and long since buried longings of Eddie. Unlike Eddie, Rodolfo is able to express desires and satisfy them.

- What aspects of Rodolfo’s personality disturb Eddie?
- Make a list of the Eddie’s different names for Rodolfo, e.g. ‘punk,’ ‘his kind’ etc.
- What are the different feelings Eddie expresses towards Rodolfo?
- Why does Eddie dismiss Rodolfo’s apology?

Style

Alfieri as device
Alfieri is more than a spokesperson for the author. Through Alfieri, Miller can guide our responses in a similar manner to Tennessee Williams in *The Glass Menagerie*. Alfieri represents the events as something that runs ‘its bloody course’ (12). These words provide an interpretation of events, before the events take place. Alfieri shifts our interest from what happens to the unfolding of character. Miller can pare down the plot so that each event primarily reveals a new aspect of Eddie. Alfieri’s responses to Eddie in the first interview are so controlled and professional, that the focus is turned to Eddie. We not only listen to what he is saying, but also concentrate on the way he is revealing himself, almost like a client in therapy.

Naturalism
Unlike plays such as *The Doll’s House*, *A View from the Bridge* is naturalistic only in part. In pure naturalism, the time on stage is the time of the story. In our play, both time and place are played with so the audience is asked to suspend disbelief, for example, when Alfieri turns from talking to the audience to being in his office with Eddie. Time is telescoped in our play and many scenes begin, as it were, in the middle of a conversation. This allows Miller to move from a speech of Alfieri into a scene where the tension is already heightened. The scenes are cut in a similar way to scenes from a film. There are, however, long scenes which are completely naturalistic, and the acting style required depends on the ideas of Stanislavski, adapted by Lee Strasberg rather than those of Brecht, for example.

Expressionism
Both Tennessee Williams and Miller experiment with naturalism as a theatre style by adopting aspects of expressionism such as the use of music, and dream sequences. In *A Streetcar named Desire*, Williams introduces music in the form of the Varsouviana, the dance that was played on the night Blanche’s young man died.
Every time it appears, only Blanche and the audience can hear it. The music suggests Blanche is becoming disturbed. In *Death of a Salesman*, Miller has Willy passing from reality to memory to dream and back to reality again.

In our play, there is only one scene which could be said to be expressionistic. It is the second interview with Eddie. As Eddie retreats with Alfieri’s strictures ringing in his ears, the telephone booth begins to glow. The emergence of the booth becomes a metaphor for the emergence of betrayal as a possibility in Eddie’s conscience.

**Classical Greek form**
Classical Greek drama has distinct elements which can be identified within Miller’s 20th Century American play. These elements include: the downfall of a hero brought about by the hero’s character failings and weaknesses; the use of a chorus as a device for communication with the audience about the morality of the characters’ actions; and the inevitable self-destruction of the hero which restores the morally corrupt mortal sphere.

Miller intended his play to reflect the Greek tragic form whereby Eddie plays out humanity’s potential for self-destruction. He is a very ordinary man, but, like the protagonist of the ancient Greek drama, he has a flaw or weakness: his inability to control his passion for his niece. This causes him, the tragic hero, to commit an offence. The consequences, social and psychological, of his wrong action destroy him.

In the self-destruction of the flawed hero, the gods are vindicated and the moral order of the universe restored. As the chorus figure, Alfieri, then explains, it is more morally sound to ‘be civilised’ and ‘settle for half’.

In order to help students understand the elements of Greek tragedy and how they are present in Miller’s work, students could convert the play to a brief Greek tragedy with the chorus and tragic hero taking centre stage. Teachers may then like to ask students to reflect on how Arthur Miller manages to imbue such a pathetic hero with the intensity of tragedy.

• In which way is Alfieri similar to the chorus in Greek tragedy?
• Explain the impact of the image of Marco standing above Eddie with the chair in his hand.
• Why is there no music in this play?

**Setting**

The set is representational rather than naturalistic. Naturalism attempts to accurately, even scientifically, copy reality. In this play, the audience is asked to be a little more strenuous in imagining the scenes as they are played. The effect of such staging is to attempt to focus the audience more on the creative attempts of the actors as well to leave the opportunity open to suggest more interior states of mind than is possible in naturalism.

• Look at the film of this play, and also *On the Waterfront*. How do the directors present the docks and the city of New York?
• What can you find in the stage directions to match these presentations? What differences are there?
• Red Hook is meant to be a contrast to Manhattan. Perhaps some scenes from Breakfast at Tiffany’s may help to give students some idea of the difference between Red Hook and Manhattan.
Section 6.
A guided approach to selected passages

Catherine and Beatrice tell Eddie about the job (17-21)

In this scene, Eddie finds out about Catherine’s offer of a job. Students need to notice how differently everybody is feeling in this scene.

• Describe how each character is feeling as the discussion about the job begins.
• Notice how carefully Beatrice is speaking to Eddie (17-18). Why do you think she speaks to Eddie in this way?
• Notice how Catherine is speaking to Eddie (17-18). How is her tone different from that of Beatrice? Can you explain why?
• Describe how Eddie receives the news. Suggest another way he could have responded to it. What is missing from his response?
• When Eddie hears the news, he has two objections. What are they?
• Beatrice continues to reason with Eddie (19-20), but the stage directions indicate her tone is changing. Why do you think this is so?
• What arguments does Beatrice put to Eddie to convince him to accept what Catherine wants?
• What are we learning about Eddie’s management of Catherine in the past?
• Notice the stage directions for Eddie and Beatrice. What is the author suggesting about Eddie’s feelings for Catherine?
• Who is the Madonna? Why does Eddie refer to Catherine in this way?
• What do you think is behind Eddie’s advice: ‘Don’t trust nobody’; and his statement ‘because most people ain’t people’? (21)
• What does Miller intend us to understand about Eddie at this stage of the play?
• What instructions might a director give to actors on how to play this scene?

Rodolfo and Catherine return from the movies (38-42)

Eddie has listened to Mike and Louis telling him about Rodolfo. We can tell from their tone how much they are delighted with him. In this scene, Eddie tries to convince Catherine that Rodolfo is no good.

• How would you describe Catherine’s and Rodolfo’s mood at the beginning of this passage?
• How would you describe the way Rodolfo speaks to Eddie?
• When Eddie says: ‘I bless you and you don’t talk to me’ (39), what feelings do you think he is expressing?
• Why do you think Eddie uses Catherine’s words at this point?
• Eddie says: ‘It’s just I used to come home, you was always there. Now, I turn around, you’re a big girl. I don’t know how to talk to you’ (40). What do you think Eddie is feeling at this point? What is he not saying?
• How has Catherine changed from the way she was at the beginning of the play?
• Is there any evidence that she still likes Eddie as much as she used to?
• How does Catherine want Eddie to feel about Rodolfo?
• Why does she tell Eddie that he is like a father to Rodolfo?
• What does she want Eddie to feel about what he has done for Rodolfo?
• When Catherine says: ‘we walk across the street he takes my arm –he almost bows to me’ (41), what feelings is she showing Eddie?
• When Eddie says: ‘Katie he’s only bowin’ to his passport’ (41), what effect is he trying to have on Catherine?
• What claim does Eddie make about Rodolfo?
What evidence does Eddie have to support his claim?
Can you think of another explanation for Rodolfo’s behaviour?
When talking about Rodolfo’s purchases, what tone does Eddie adopt?
Since the beginning of the conversation how has Eddie’s tone towards Catherine changed?
Examine Eddie’s statements: ‘they been pullin’ this since the Immigration law was put in! They grab a green kid that don’t know nothin’ and they…’ (42). What do these statements suggest about Rodolfo and Catherine?
How do you imagine Catherine would feel about herself and Rodolfo being characterised in this way?
What does Catherine say and do?

Eddie speaks to Alfieri (45-49)

Eddie comes to visit Alfieri because, as he says, ‘My father always said you was a smart man’ (45). Part of Eddie realises he needs help, but he does not come to listen. He comes to have his own version of Rodolfo and Catherine’s relationship endorsed, and to make use of the law to stop Rodolfo from marrying Catherine. Alfieri is full of compassion for Eddie but his approach to him is one of professional discipline and restraint.

Notice the tone of Alfieri on page 45. ‘I’m only a lawyer?’ Why does Alfieri say this?
Eddie says: ‘So it must be that he’d got it laid out in his mind already –he’s stayin’. Right?’ (46). Does Alfieri agree with Eddie? Does Eddie believe he has? Why is this moment important?
What does Eddie mean when he says ‘The guy ain’t right’ (46).
Why do you think Eddie seems unable to express, simply and directly, his opinion of Rodolfo?
Eddie is making a specific claim about Rodolfo. What is the claim and what evidence does he present to Alfieri in support of this claim?
Is Eddie open to any evidence to the contrary?
How reliable is this evidence? Is Eddie convinced?
What feelings does Eddie experience as he ‘brings out his thoughts?’ (47)
Why do you think Alfieri does not debate Eddie’s claims directly?
What does Alfieri say to Eddie on page 48?
Why doesn’t Alfieri speak to Eddie directly about his difficulty in letting Catherine go?
Towards the end of the interview Alfieri becomes more authoritative and directive. ‘Make up your mind to it’; ‘There’s nothing you can do’ (48, 49). What is Alfieri trying to achieve by this change of tone?
What do you notice about the way Alfieri brings the interview to an end? What happens to Eddie?