

‘A View From The Bridge’

by

Arthur Miller



'A View From The Bridge' by Arthur Miller

Context

To understand the context of Arthur Miller's play you need to know a bit about Miller himself, and some background facts about migration from Italy to the US during the 1950s.



The Brooklyn Bridge over the East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn



Arthur Miller, 1915 - 2005

Arthur Miller was born to a Jewish family in New York in 1915. His grandparents had come to America from Poland. When the family business failed, they moved to Brooklyn, where *A View from the Bridge* is set. There, Arthur worked in a warehouse to earn money for his university fees. He began to write plays while he was a student at the University of Michigan and continued to do so after he graduated in 1938 and became a **journalist**. He received much acclaim from *All My Sons* in 1947; *Death of a Salesman* (1949) - which won the **Pulitzer Prize** - and *The Crucible* (1952) confirmed him as a great **playwright**.

Between his years as a journalist and making his name as a writer, Miller worked in the Brooklyn shipyards for two years, where he befriended the Italians he worked alongside. He heard a story of some men coming over to work illegally and being betrayed. The story inspired *A View from the Bridge*, which was written in 1955. It was originally a one-act play, but Miller re-worked it into a two-act play the following year.

Miller's first marriage ended in divorce in 1956. He then married the actress Marilyn Monroe, but they divorced in 1961. His third marriage was to a photographer, Inge Morath.

Most of his work is set in the America of the day and portrays realistic characters and events. He deals with political and moral issues and weaves in ideas from **Greek tragedy**. He is interested in how personal relationships dictate the way one leads one's life and about people's struggles to do what is right.

Italian Immigration

Italy in 1955 was a very poor country. During World War 2, Italy - ruled by the Fascist Mussolini - had initially fought alongside Nazi Germany. Yet the Italians became increasingly anxious about their role in the war and about Fascism, and in 1943, Mussolini was deposed by Victor Emmanuel III, the king of Italy. Italy then switched sides in the war and supported the British allies, but suffered huge losses in northern towns and villages as the Nazis tried to take revenge. After the war, following a referendum, the monarchy was abolished and a republic was established.

However, the economy was slow to grow, especially in the south, which was less industrialised. With no jobs and no prospects, it was not surprising that many people decided to try their luck in 'rich' America. There was a thriving trade in illegal immigration, encouraged by the dockyard owners, who knew that they could get cheap labour from immigrants until they had paid for their passage over. Once they had paid their fare, the immigrants were left to make their own way.



When Italy joined the new European Economic Community in 1957, much money was pumped into Italy to reduce unemployment. One key part of this process was the establishment of the Fiat factory in Turin: thousands of peasants from the south moved north to make cars. Sadly, this was just too late for Marco and Rodolpho.

The play is set in Red Hook, Brooklyn, a very poor area, described by Alfieri as ***'the slum that faces the bay on the seaward side of Brooklyn Bridge.'***

Plot

The Carbone family - Eddie, his wife Beatrice and her orphaned niece Catherine - are poor but content. They live in Brooklyn, where Eddie works at the shipyards.

When Beatrice's Italian cousins, illegal immigrants, arrive to stay, the Carbone family's life changes forever. Their loves and their loyalties are tested - and **tragedy** results.

What actually *happens* in the play?

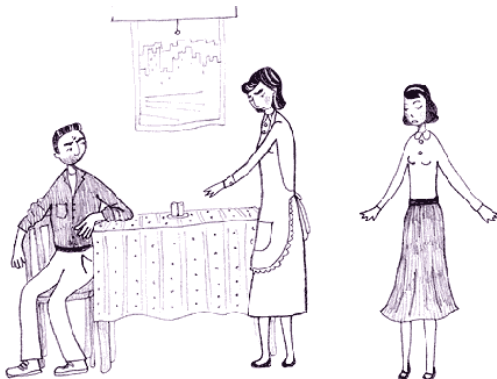
Act 1a



The play opens with the lawyer Alfieri, who sets the scene. He talks about justice and how, sometimes, justice is dealt with outside the law. He says he has a timeless story to tell - one that ran a **'bloody course'** he was powerless to prevent - and introduces its hero, Eddie Carbone.

One day Eddie arrives home from the dockyard where he works with some news. He announces that Beatrice's two cousins from Italy have reached New York and they will arrive at the family's home at 10 o'clock that night. It is obvious that the family has often discussed the visit before - Beatrice is anxious that she hasn't completed all the preparations in the house she had intended to welcome them, and Eddie reminds Beatrice not to be so kind to the cousins that he will be turned out of his own bed for them. Yet he then claims it is an honour for him to be able to help them.

Act 1b



Catherine also has some news: she tells Eddie that she has been picked out of all the girls in her typing class to be offered a well-paid job at a big plumbing company. She is excited at the prospect, but Eddie is worried: he doesn't want her mixing with strangers, wants her to finish her education and is concerned for her safety. Beatrice takes Catherine's

side, however, so in the end Eddie relents and allows Catherine to take the job.

Because the cousins are illegal immigrants, Eddie reminds Beatrice and Catherine not to mention them outside the house. To reinforce the danger, Eddie tells the story of Vinny Bolzano, who let on to the Immigration

authorities that his family were hiding an uncle - and the bloody consequences.

Act 1c



The cousins, Marco and Rodolpho, arrive and are warmly welcomed. The quiet, polite Marco reassures Eddie that they will not outstay their welcome and talks about his family left behind in Sicily, desperate for the cash that he will be able to send them once he starts work. He hopes to go

home in about six years. The cheerful Rodolpho describes what it is like living in a poor peasant village: unlike his brother, he wants to stay in America.

Rodolpho shows off his voice by singing 'Paper Doll', to Catherine's delight. Eddie puts a stop to the music because he doesn't want suspicions raised in the neighbourhood, but we also sense Eddie's dislike of Rodolpho - his face is **'puffed with trouble.'**

Act 1d

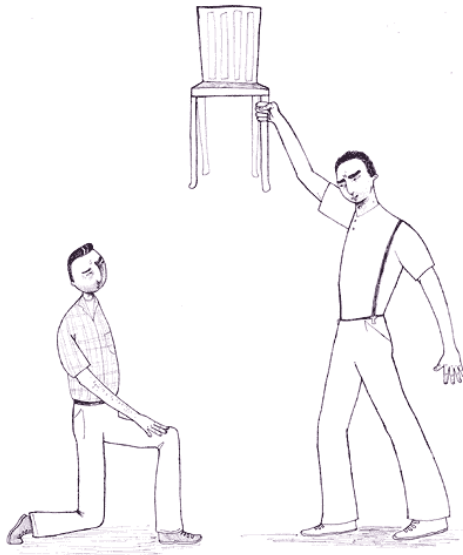


A few weeks later, Eddie and Beatrice sit waiting for Catherine and Rodolpho to come home from the cinema. It is clear that Rodolpho and Catherine have fallen in love. Eddie's hostility towards Rodolpho is now more open and he is anxious - Beatrice jokes that he must be jealous of Rodolpho. She admires Rodolpho and hope that he and Catherine will marry, but Eddie is appalled by this idea. This conversation leads Beatrice to ask Eddie about the state of their own marriage: they have not made love for months. Eddie refuses to discuss it.

When Catherine and Rodolpho finally return, Eddie asks to speak to Catherine alone. He repeats, wistfully, that she has grown up without his realising it. When she admits to liking Rodolpho, Eddie tells her that Rodolpho is only using her and that he just wants to marry an American to gain US citizenship. Catherine is very upset. She admits privately to Beatrice that she loves Rodolpho and wants to marry him, but that she doesn't want to hurt Eddie. Beatrice advises her to be more independent and grown up, and less intimate with Eddie in the house.

Act 1e

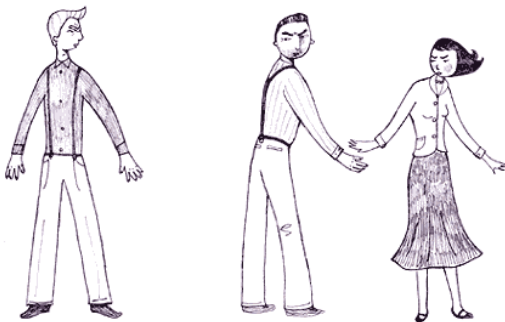
Eddie goes to see Alfieri, wanting the law to step in to stop Catherine marrying Rodolpho. He claims that Rodolpho is only doing it to gain a US passport, and that Rodolpho is homosexual. Eddie is amazed when Alfieri explains that no law can prevent the marriage. Alfieri hints that perhaps Eddie loves Catherine too much (over and beyond the caring, uncle-niece love which could be expected), to which Eddie reacts angrily.



There is **tension** in the air when we next see Eddie, Beatrice, Catherine, Marco and Rodolpho at home together. Eddie makes barbed comments, implying that Rodolpho is too friendly with Catherine and too casual with his money. He pretends to admire the fact that Rodolpho can cook, sew and sing, before adding that it is wrong for someone with those skills to work at the docks. He offers to treat Rodolpho and Marco to a night watching a prize-fight and teaches Rodolpho to box. This is clearly just an excuse to punch Rodolpho, but Rodolpho takes it good-humouredly. Catherine

shows that she is more interested in Rodolpho's safety than Eddie's. Marco shows off his own strength to Eddie by lifting a chair by its leg with one hand - a feat that Eddie cannot match.

Act 2a



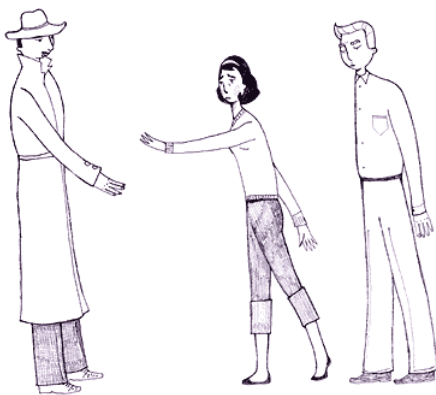
It is nearly Christmas. Catherine and Rodolpho are alone in the apartment for the first time. Catherine is sombre. She asks Rodolpho if they could live in Italy when they are married, but he claims it would be ridiculous to go back to such poverty. He does reassure her that he is not going to marry her just to gain US citizenship, however. She says that she doesn't want to hurt Eddie.

When he has comforted her, they go into the bedroom. Eddie returns, drunk, and is aghast to see Rodolpho follow Catherine out of the bedroom. He tells Rodolpho to leave immediately; Catherine says that she will go too, but Eddie grabs her and kisses her. When Rodolpho protests, saying Catherine is going to be his wife, Eddie kisses him too. The men fight, **'like animals.'**

Four days later, Eddie returns to Alfieri and tells him what happened. Marco has not been told of the fight. Alfieri reiterates that there is nothing Eddie or the law can do to prevent the wedding. He advises Eddie to let the couple

marry, warning him that there could be awful consequences if he didn't. Yet Eddie ignores Alfieri's words and telephones the Immigration Bureau, anonymously, to betray the cousins. When Eddie returns home, he finds that Marco and Rodolpho have moved upstairs to a neighbour's apartment. There is a tense conversation with Beatrice - she is very angry with him. Beatrice tells Eddie that Catherine and Rodolpho are going to get married next week, ironically because Catherine is afraid that the authorities will catch up with the brothers. She tries to get Eddie - who has tears in his eyes - to agree to come to the wedding and, when Catherine comes in, Beatrice encourages Catherine to ask Eddie herself. Catherine refuses to listen to Eddie's suggestion that it is not too late for her to meet other boys - his last-ditch attempt to prevent the wedding.

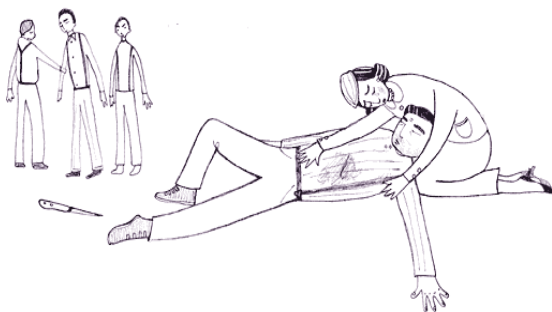
Act 2b



When Eddie discovers that Marco and Rodolpho are lodged with two other illegal immigrants upstairs, he becomes concerned and warns that they will be less safe from the authorities there. He is obviously regretting the call he made to the Immigration Bureau, but it is too late - two officers arrive. It is clear that Beatrice and Catherine immediately suspect that Eddie was the informer. As the officers lead Marco, Rodolpho and the two other immigrants away, Catherine pleads with the men to spare Rodolpho and Marco

spits in Eddie's face. Eddie shouts out that he'll kill Marco; Marco retorts that Eddie has stolen food from his children. Eddie protests that he is innocent, but all the neighbours turn away from him. The honour of both Eddie and Marco is now at stake. We next see Marc, Rodolpho and Catherine with Alfieri in the reception room of the prison: Alfieri needs a promise from Marco that he will not kill Eddie as a condition of bail. Marco is reluctant, feeling that Eddie should be punished, but agrees.

Act 2c



It is the day of the wedding. Beatrice gets dressed in her best clothes, but Eddie tells her that if she goes, he won't let her back into the house. Catherine is angry, calling Eddie a rat. When Rodolpho arrives to take Catherine to the church, he says that Marco is at the church, praying. Eddie's fury rises:

he wants to get even with Marco, for ruining his good name in the neighbourhood. Beatrice tries to calm him, telling him that the reason he is angry is because he is about to lose Catherine for ever - but this truth fires Eddie up even more. Marco arrives, calling Eddie's name. Eddie goes to meet

him in the street and demands a public apology. Instead, Marco calls him an **'animal.'** Eddie draws a knife but Marco is able to grip Eddie's wrist and turn the knife on Eddie himself. Eddie dies in Beatrice's arms. Alfieri closes the play, commenting on how useless Eddie's death was, and on how much he admired him for allowing himself to be **'wholly known.'**

Character

When the play begins, we see the Carbone family - part of a poor Italian community in Brooklyn - excited about the imminent arrival of Beatrice's cousins from Italy.

Yet the arrival of Marco and Rodolpho fires up tensions that have been smouldering under the surface of the family for a while, and the result is tragic.

Let's look at the characters in more detail. If you've time, jot down the key things you can remember about each character, then see if you included all the points below (you may have thought of additional points to include):

Eddie Carbone



- Eddie is 40 years old, an American of Sicilian decent. He is described as **'a husky, slightly overweight longshoreman.'**
- He is an ordinary man, part of the local Italian community.
- He is **master of the house** - both Beatrice and Catherine are obviously used to him laying down the rules. He sees this as a 'manly' thing to do and he expects all men to do the same - which is why he cannot accept Rodolpho's more gentle talents.
- He is generous enough to offer a home to Beatrice's cousins, but at the same time slightly wary and **self-protective** or **selfish** - he reminds Beatrice not to let them sleep in his bed. (Perhaps this prepares us for the way he deals with his love for Catherine: is he selfish then too?)
- He **doesn't trust people** easily. He tells Catherine, **'the less you trust, the less you be sorry.'** (This prepares us for his suspicion of Rodolpho.)
- He is concerned about his **honour** and protecting his good name. He ends the tale of the informer Vinny Bolzano, **'a guy do a thing like that? How's he gonna show his face?'**
- He is very **protective** of Catherine, whom he has brought up as if she were his own daughter. He paid for her typing lessons and had ambitions for her to rise to a different class. He is proud of her looks, yet concerned that she will attract the attention of men and is concerned about her new job. He finds it hard to admit that she has become a woman. **'I guess I just never figured... that you would ever grow up.'**
- However, it soon becomes apparent that Eddie is **in love with Catherine**. He has not made love to his wife for three months. He quickly becomes **jealous** of Rodolpho because of the immediate

impression Rodolpho makes on Catherine. The **stage directions** tell us, **'He looks at [Catherine] like a lost boy'** when she tells him she loves Rodolpho. He is unable to admit this shameful emotion to himself and is angry when Beatrice and Alfieri dare to mention it.

- As his feelings for Catherine become more **obsessive**, he does everything he can to prevent Rodolpho from marrying her.
 - He tries to undermine Rodolpho. For example, he mocks Rodolpho's skills at cooking, singing and sewing, claims he is homosexual and tells Catherine that he only wants her to gain US citizenship.
 - He tries to get the law involved and is amazed when Alfieri says that nothing can be done.
 - He tries violence: he 'teaches' Rodolpho to box as an excuse to hit him, then fights with Rodolpho when he knows Rodolpho has slept with Catherine.
 - He calls the Immigration Bureau in a last desperate attempt to stop the wedding: he cares so much for Catherine that he is prepared to break his code of honour.
- In the end, he **loses everything**: Catherine, his wife, his name. He has no option but to fight Marco to the death (he has the knife). Ironically, his death restores some of his lost honour because he does not try to escape his fate.
- The **conflict** that ends his life recalls other conflict we have seen:
 - **Verbal conflict** with all the other characters at some point or another. Even his jokes are barbed and bitter.
 - **Physical conflict** with Rodolpho.
 - **Conflict within himself** as he grapples with his love of Catherine.

Beatrice Carbone



- She is Eddie's wife. She has never had children of her own and cares for Catherine as if she were her own daughter.
- She is a **loving, caring** person. She is excited by the imminent arrival of her cousins and worried that everything is not just so for them, yet also **'nervous.'**
- She **defers to Eddie** and lets him control things in the home. Before the arrival of her cousins, she is anxious not to upset him: **'I'm just worried about you.'**
- There are hints right from the start that she is **aware of Eddie's feelings** for Catherine, such as when she avoids Eddie's gaze when Catherine fetches his cigar. This becomes more obvious when she confronts Eddie about the state of their marriage: **'When am I gonna be a wife again, Eddie?'**
- Partly because of this, she **supports Catherine** and **encourages her** to be independent. She helps Catherine persuade Eddie to let Catherine go out to work and, later, tells Catherine she must stand up for herself. **'It means you gotta be your own self more.'**
- She has a no-nonsense, practical approach, makes clear observations and is assertive. At the end, she is brave enough to tell Eddie the truth: **'You want somethin' else, Eddie, and you can never have her!'**

- She is upset by the conflict within the family that the relationship between Rodolpho and Catherine causes. She continually tries to be the calming influence. At the end, however, she remains loyal to Eddie, choosing to stay with him rather than attend Catherine's wedding. She is rewarded for this with Eddie's dying words – **'My B!'**

Catherine



- She is 17 years old, the orphaned daughter of Beatrice's sister Nancy.
- She is **attractive, energetic** and **cheerful**. Yet she is also **naive** - she has never known anything of life outside the Carbone household.
- She **loves Eddie like a father**.
- She wants his approval for everything that she does: right at the start, she is desperate for him to admire her new skirt.
- Later we hear that perhaps she is too familiar with Eddie now she has grown up: Beatrice tells her not to wander round the apartment in her slip, which shocks and saddens Catherine – (the stage directions say). She is at the edge of tears, as though a familiar world had shattered. She had never before imagined there was anything wrong with her relationship with Eddie.
- She is excited at Marco and Rodolpho's arrival - they represent the world outside her own sheltered life. She is attracted to Rodolpho straight away - so she is reluctant to take off her high heels when Eddie tells her to!
- She is initially **tormented** because her love of Rodolpho is at odds with her love for Eddie.
- She tries to encourage Eddie to talk to Rodolpho: *Why don't you talk to him, Eddie? He blesses you, and you don't talk to him hardly.*
- She is loyal to Eddie and tells Beatrice that her marriage to Rodolpho would be wrong if Eddie is against it.
- However, she is **prepared to take sides**: when Eddie spars with Rodolpho at the end of Act 1, she rushes to help her lover. (This prepares us for her choosing to marry Rodolpho in spite of Eddie's wishes in Act 2.)
- By the start of Act 2, she has become quieter and more withdrawn, concerned about the rift between the two men she loves. She mourns to Rodolpho, **'I mean I know him and now I'm supposed to turn around and make a stranger out of him?'**
- However, she is **strong** enough to leave Eddie to get married, and is furious with him both for betraying the bothers and for forbidding Beatrice to attend her wedding ceremony, calling him **'This rat!'**
- During the play, she turns from a child into a woman, capable of making her own decisions. Despite her new **independence** and **maturity**, she blames herself on Eddie's death: **'Eddie, I never meant to do nothing bad to you.'** Do you think she is partly responsible for the **tragedy**?

Marco



- Marco is the older brother of Rodolpho. He comes from a poor village in Sicily. He is Beatrice's cousin.
- He has left a wife and three children at home, the oldest of whom has tuberculosis. He has come to America so he can earn more money for them than he could at home. It is clear he **loves his family** very much: he is near to tears when he first talks about them to the Carbones.
- He is anxious not to outstay his welcome with the Carbones: almost his first words are **'I want to tell you now, Eddie - when you say we go, we go.'** He is extremely **polite**.
- He always speaks **simply** and **clearly**; which indicates his straightforward, uncomplicated character.
- He is very **strong**. Eddie's friend Mike describes him as a **'regular bull.'**
- He feels a **sense of responsibility** for Rodolpho: when Eddie is upset that Catherine and Rodolpho were out late, he warns his brother **'You come home early now.'**
- However, he is also **protective** of Rodolpho. After Eddie has punched Rodolpho while 'teaching' him to box, he shows how he can lift a chair above his head with one hand. The **stage directions** tell us the chair is raised like a weapon over Eddie's head. He is warning Eddie that he will defend Rodolpho if necessary.
- He has a clear **sense of justice**. He sees things as right or wrong. When he is arrested, he spits in Eddie's face and accuses Eddie in front of the neighbours – **'That one! He killed my children!'**
- His sense of **honour** is such that if the law can't right a wrong, he will take the law into his own hands. He comes to see Eddie at the end to do what he sees as his **duty** - even when Alfieri had warned him that only God makes justice. (It is interesting that he breaks his word to Alfieri - he kills Eddie despite having promised he would not.)
- Do you think that Marco would have killed Eddie if Eddie has not got out a knife? What do you think is Marco's reaction to Eddie's death?

Rodolpho



- He is the younger brother of Marco.
- He has got platinum hair and so makes an immediate impression. He has striking good looks - Beatrice and Catherine are obviously attracted to him. His unusual looks may be a signal to us that he is 'different' from the average Italian immigrant. (We later find that he has a different, more sensitive way of trying to solve disputes from Eddie and Marco.)
- He has a good **sense of humour**, so he is popular. He is unvaryingly polite, even when Eddie is rude.

- Unlike Marco, he wants to **stay in America** and own a motorbike. He loves America and wants to find out as much about New York as possible - he is keen to see Broadway. Eddie is concerned because he buys 'American' items like a new jacket and records, rather than send money to Marco's family.
- He can sing, cook and sew: he is very **talented**. It upsets him that Eddie seems to dislike him so much - he cannot understand why his 'feminine' skills are a problem for the 'manly' Eddie.
- His language is lively and imaginative, which shows his intelligence. For example, later in the play, he uses the **image** of Catherine as a bird in a cage.
- Catherine **falls in love** with him almost immediately, and he with her. Even though Eddie tries to suggest that Rodolpho only wants to marry Catherine in order to become a US citizen, it is clear his love is strong and genuine: *'You think I would carry on my back the rest of my life a woman I didn't love just to be an American?'* He speaks very passionately.
- He does not see things in such black and white terms as Marco - he attempts to mediate between Marco and Eddie and is **sensitive** to both points of view. We realise that, in the end, he is more **responsible** than Marco.
- He argues with Marco to promise not to harm Eddie, so that Marco can be granted bail and attend the wedding.
- He apologises to Eddie before the wedding and tries to kiss his hand, in an attempt to calm the situation.
- He tries to prevent Marco and Eddie fighting – *'No, Marco, please! Eddie, please, he has children!'*

Alfieri



- He is a **lawyer**, born in Italy, who has been working in Brooklyn for 25 years. He is part of the same immigrant Italian community as Eddie.
- He acts as a **commentator** on the action: he sets the scene and introduces the characters. He is telling us the story of the play in **flashback**: right from the start we know that it is going to run a bloody course. Do you feel that he needs to tell us about what he has seen?
- He is **compassionate**. He tries to save Eddie and, later, Marco, from the fatal course that they have set out on.
- When Eddie first goes to see him, Alfieri warns, *'...there is too much love for the daughter, there is too much love for the niece. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?'*
- - When Eddie visits him the second time to try to prevent Catherine and Rodolpho's wedding, Alfieri's warning is more explicit: *'You won't have a friend in the world, Eddie!'*
- He tells Marco, Only God makes justice, trying to prevent Marco from taking the law into his own hands.

- However, really he is **powerless to change** what he knows is inevitable. Even though he can explain the law to Eddie and Marco, he knows deep down that they will do what their code of honour requires. He is like the **chorus** in a Greek tragedy, commenting on the action and explaining it to the audience, but unable to alter it.

Dramatic effect

Here's what Miller himself said about the **dramatic** nature of the play. 'I wanted to write a play that had the cleanliness ... the clear line of some of the Greek tragedies. Meaning that we would be confronted with a situation and we would be told in effect what the ending was. The question was not *what* was going to happen, but *how* it was going to happen.'

Each of the following aspects of the play contribute importantly to the build up of dramatic tension as we wait to see how the **tragedy** will play out.

As you read the play, it is important to imagine yourself watching and listening to the action. It is a *drama*, not a novel! The **stage directions** are important in helping us to imagine exactly what is going on: they can help us picture each character's actions and reactions.

During the course of *A View from the Bridge* the Carbone family change from a poor but loving family into one torn apart by mistrust, jealousy and violence. Ask yourself what happens to create such a dramatic **contrast**? How is the tension maintained and the audience involved?

'A Greek tragedy'

Like a Greek drama - where the action all takes place in a single location - most of the action of this play takes place in the Carbone's apartment or immediately outside it. Miller explains at the opening of Act 1 how Alfieri's office can fit into this setting too (it is Alfieri's *view from the bridge* that we see).



Alfieri is established immediately as the **commentator**. He introduces the play, narrates the story in **flashback**, focussing on key scenes, then closes the play. He is in control and we trust him.

- He is like the **Chorus** in a Greek tragedy, explaining the events on stage to the audience without actually participating in them.
- Although he does play some part in the action, it is clear that he was *powerless* and that nothing he could have done would have altered the

bloody course. He tells us right from the start what is going to happen: **dramatic** interest is maintained because we want to find out how.

- He reminds us at various intervals during the play that the ending is inevitable, such as near the end of Act 1: ***'I could see every step coming, step after step, like a dark figure walking down a hall towards a certain door.'***

The Character of Eddie

The **drama revolves around Eddie**. He is the focal point. Everything rests on Eddie's reaction to events. At first this is comparatively minor: will he or won't he allow Catherine to take the job at the plumbing company? Yet soon it becomes crucial: will he or won't he understand that he cannot keep Catherine to himself - that he must allow her to live her own life? Eddie is the centre round which all the conflict in the play revolves.

- **Verbal conflict** with all the other characters at some point or another. He often deliberately starts arguments - for instance, he questions the virtue of the wives of Italian immigrants: ***'I betcha there's plenty of surprises sometimes when those guys get back there, heh?'*** Even his jokes are barbed and bitter.
- **Conflict within himself** as he grapples with his love of Catherine.
- **Physical conflict** with Rodolpho and, ultimately, Marco.

This creates a lot of tension, with each scene of conflict becoming more intense than the one that preceded it. The tense atmosphere during the boxing at the end of Act 1 leads on to the shock near the start of Act 2 when an enraged Eddie kisses both Catherine and Rodolpho and starts a fight - which in turn prepares us for the final scene.

Tone and Timing



There are numerous changes in **tone**. Again, this is often dependent on Eddie. If he is in a good mood, such as immediately the cousins arrive and the **stage directions** tell us he is ***'laughing'***, the tone is light-hearted; if he is in a bad mood, such as later on that night when ***'his face puffed with trouble'***, there is tension. Can you think of any other changes in the tone in the play?

Timing is crucial to the action of the play. For example, Eddie calls the Immigration Bureau after his meeting with Alfieri on the very day that Catherine says that she is going to marry Rodolpho soon because she is scared of him getting caught by Immigration; simultaneously Marco and Rodolpho move out of the apartment, and thereby cause other immigrants - relatives of the Liparis who have nothing to do with Eddie - to be picked up too. From then on, the pace increases quickly to the end.

These examples of unlucky timing give rise to **dramatic irony** (where the audience have a better idea of what is going to happen than the characters do themselves). Another example is when the Immigration Officers appear

outside the Carbones' apartment just as Catherine is arguing with Eddie over where Marco and Rodolpho will go if Eddie throws them out of the building. We know their argument is pointless because the officers are about to pounce. The effect of dramatic irony is to involve us in the action, to make us feel implicated, almost as if we are ourselves characters in the play.

The Ending

The **ending** is poignant. A private **tragedy** ends up being acted out in public. All the main characters and other people are on the street outside the apartment to see Eddie killed by Marco. Alfieri rounds off the **drama** by reminding us that Eddie's death was useless and that he loved him, but that he mourns him with **'a certain... alarm.'** What does Alfieri mean by this?

- He is thinking that even though he could predict what was going to happen, even he - a lawyer - could do nothing to prevent it.
- Probably he is thinking that Eddie's faults are common ones, and that his story should be a warning to us all to be more self-aware.
- Perhaps another, equally disturbing thought has occurred to him: that when it finally comes, Eddie's destruction feels not only tragic, but in some way right and appropriate: like the old generation making way for the new.



Themes

A **theme** is an idea that runs through a text. A **text** may have one **theme** or many. Understanding the themes makes the text more than 'just' a story - it becomes something more significant, because we're encouraged to think deeper about the story and work out what lies beyond the plot.

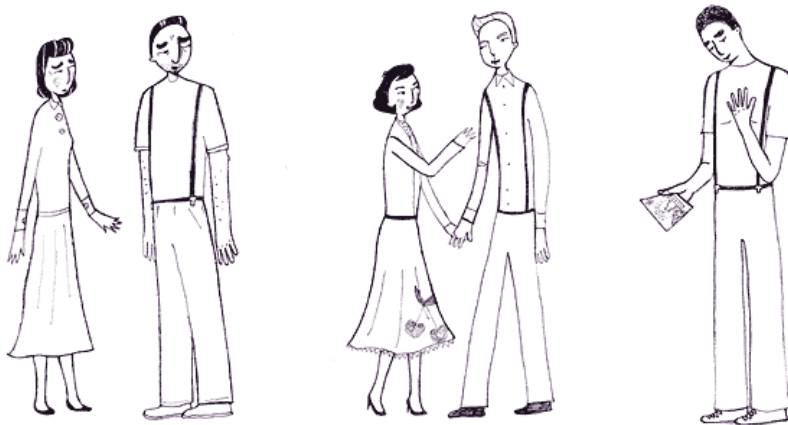
In *A View from the Bridge*, the central themes are **Love, Justice and the Law**, and **Codes of Honour**. Together, they help us to learn about the characters and understand why they act as they do.

Love

There are various types of love explored in the play. From which characters do we learn about the different sorts of love?

Type of Love	Characters
Love of a family	- Beatrice, Eddie and Catherine are first seen as a loving family - Marco loves his family deeply. He has come to America to help them. He misses them a lot.

	- In the wider sense, Beatrice loves her family in Sicily enough to support her cousins. Family ties are very important.
Father - daughter love	- Eddie and Catherine, although uncle and niece, have become more like a father and daughter. Eddie made a lot of sacrifices to provide Catherine with the best education he could.
Brotherly love	- Marco and Rodolpho have a strong bond - great enough for Marco to lay down his life for his brother's cause.
Romantic / married love	- Eddie and Beatrice's marriage is obviously not as strong as it used to be: Beatrice asks, 'When am I gonna be a wife again, Eddie?' They have not slept together for months. - Catherine and Rodolpho quickly fall deeply in love. - Eddie's love for Catherine has become sexual, even though he refuses to admit it. This is the cause of the friction in his own marriage and the dispute with Rodolpho and Marco.
Love of a place	- Rodolpho and Marco love their homeland. - Rodolpho also loves America. Catherine says, 'he's crazy for New York.'



The play shows us that love is not always beautiful - it is responsible for all the **conflict** between the characters. It is a deep passion that can create jealousy and cause pain both to the person who loves, the person who is loved and those around them. For Eddie, love also causes conflict within himself when he cannot admit to his illicit love for Catherine.

What do you imagine happens to the lovers Catherine and Rodolpho at the end of the play? Do they go on to find happiness? What about Beatrice?

Justice and the Law

The words **justice** and **law** are frequently heard in the **play**. Alfieri, the lawyer, establishes that **justice** and the **law** are going to be important in the play in his opening speech. He sets the story that he is going to tell us in the **context** of history, both ancient and modern.

'In Sicily, from where their fathers came, the law has not been a friendly idea since the Greeks were beaten..'

'I only came here when I was twenty-five. In those days, Al Capone, the greatest Carthaginian of all, was learning his trade on these pavements, and Frankie Yale himself was cut precisely in half by a machine-gun on the corner of Union Street, two blocks away.'

The fact that Alfieri goes on to state that lawyers in ancient times, as well as he in modern times, were unable to prevent a **'complaint'** running a **'bloody course'** causes us to question the power and influence of the law. In other words, although justice is very important, often the law as it stands is incapable of delivering justice.

Alfieri believes that it is best to **'settle for half'**: it is better to rely on written law as far as possible and accept it even when you are only 'half' satisfied. The written law may not always act in favour of justice yet it is better to follow the law than to take it into your own hands. In the play we see that Eddie betrays Marco and Rodolpho: there is no law to punish Eddie so Marco takes the law into his own hands and the play ends with a fight to the death. Alfieri reiterates his beliefs at the end of the play: **'Most of the time now we settle for half and I like it better.'** Alfieri values the law more than justice, he sees that when people go against the law to assert justice it can lead to **conflict** and death.

The play encourages us to ask: what is justice? What makes justice? Both Eddie and Marco have strong ideas of what is 'just' and are prepared to go to great lengths to achieve it. The characters often mistake their own desires for justice, they fail to look for a higher principle of justice separate from their own feelings. This is what leads to conflict.

Here are some more instances in the play when **justice** and the **law** feature:

- The story of Vinny Bolzano is an example of how someone obeying the law (as Vinny technically was when he informed on his uncle) is actually doing something unjust. Do you think the treatment of Vinny by his relations was just?
- Alfieri tries to warn Eddie about his relationship with Catherine and argues with him to allow her to marry Rodolpho. **When the law is wrong it's because it's unnatural, but in this case it is natural and a river will drown you if you buck it now.** He is suggesting that it is Eddie's feelings for Catherine that are 'unnatural'.
- Eddie makes recourse to the law that he previously spurned when he telephones the Immigration Bureau. Eddie has no fixed principle of justice: his **feelings** dictate what he believes to be 'just'.
- Alfieri tries to make Marco realise who is the real 'judge' of events - God. **'You hear? Only God makes justice.'**

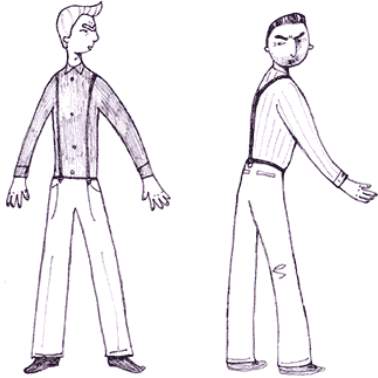


Both Eddie and Marco allow their personal feelings to affect their idea of justice. They are not strong enough to take an objective view. We see that Alfieri is right: people are not strong enough to execute true justice, and their desires and feelings always take a part. This is why it is better to rely on

the law, which although flawed offers an objective view.

Note down other references to **justice** and **law** in the play and decide what ideas they contribute to the **theme**.

Codes of Honour



Connecting the **themes** of **Justice and the Law** and **Love** is the theme of **Honour**. Eddie and Beatrice's tale of Vinny Bolzano at the start of the play sets the **tone**:

'The family had an uncle that they were hidin' in the house, and he [Vinny] snitched to the Immigration.'

'He had five brothers and the old father. And they grabbed him in the kitchen and pulled him down the stairs - three flights his head was bouncin' like a coconut. And they spit on him in the street, his own father and his brothers. The whole neighbourhood was crying.'

It is clear that, in the eyes of Eddie and Beatrice, Vinny had done something very wrong and was justly punished. Eddie is clear that Vinny will never be seen in the neighbourhood again out of shame: ***'a guy do a thing like that? How's he gonna show his face?'*** Family comes first. To betray one's family is a crime and should be punished - Vinny gets no sympathy despite the injuries inflicted upon him: it was seen that he got what he deserved. It is ironic that Eddie does just the same thing as Vinny - 'snitch to Immigration' - to Marco and Rodolpho at the end of the play.

Honour is shown to be very important, especially to the male characters. It means far more to them than the law. To be honourable is to be respected. If you do anything dishonourable, you lose respect. That is why Marco and Eddie are so keen to protect their names and get a 'just' conclusion. Codes of honour bind families and the whole neighbourhood with a sense of community. Everyone should look out for one another, to betray someone is the most dishonourable action imaginable.

Here are some examples of how honour works in the play:

- Eddie tells Beatrice, ***'It's an honour, B. I mean it.'*** when they discuss the imminent arrival of the cousins.
- Perhaps one of the reasons why Eddie finds it impossible to admit his love for Catherine is because he knows how dishonourable it is.
- Alfieri warns Eddie that he will lose the respect of the neighbourhood if he betrays the brothers. ***'You won't have a friend in the world, Eddie!'*** It is significant that a lawyer (whom we would expect to uphold the law) is encouraging Eddie to do something illegal by continuing to keep the brothers hidden.
- Marco believes the only honourable course is to punish Eddie when Eddie betrayed the brothers. Alfieri tries to persuade him otherwise: ***'To***

promise not to kill is not dishonourable' - but Marco's sense of honour is too strong. (It is interesting that Marco had given Alfieri his word that he would not harm Eddie, yet then does so: clearly, Marco's need for revenge is stronger than any fear about breaking a promise.)

- Eddie, however, blindly refuses to believe that he has done anything wrong. He desperately wants to get back his good name after Marco's accusations caused the neighbourhood to turn away from him.

'Marco's got my name - and you run tell him, kid, that he's gonna give it back to me in front of this neighbourhood, or we have it out.'

Do you think that Eddie dies an 'honourable' death? He does not try to escape his fate - in fact, he encourages it - perhaps because he realised that he had no option.