Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

# A View from the Bridge

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## Plot

- Red Hook, Brooklyn, New York, in the 1950s. Alfieri, a lawyer, narrates. Eddie Carbone, a dock worker, lives with his wife Beatrice and her orphaned niece Catherine, who is 17 and whom Eddie is overprotective of.
- Beatrice's cousins Marco and Rodolpho arrive illegally from Sicily to work. Marco sends money home to his starving family; Rodolpho, blond and lively, sings, cooks and sews.
- Catherine and Rodolpho fall in love. Eddie, jealous, claims Rodolpho only wants an American passport and questions his manliness. Alfieri tells him the law can do nothing.
- Eddie kisses Catherine and Rodolpho, then betrays the cousins to the Immigration Bureau, breaking the community's code. Marco spits in his face and accuses him in front of everyone. Demanding his "name" back, Eddie fights Marco with a knife and is killed with it.

## Characters

- Eddie: proud and protective, but his feelings for Catherine, which he can't admit, destroy him. He is a tragic hero with a **fatal flaw**.
- Beatrice: loving and patient, she sees the truth about Eddie's feelings before anyone.
- Catherine: grows from a naive girl into a young woman who makes her own choices.
- Marco: strong, quiet and honourable; he believes in the old Sicilian justice. Rodolpho: cheerful, open and in love with America.
- Alfieri: the narrator and **chorus**, who knows from the start how it will end but can't stop it.

## Themes and context

- Justice and the law: American law against the community's code of **honour** and loyalty.
- Masculinity, **honour** and reputation, love and jealousy, betrayal and immigration.
- Arthur Miller based the play on a story he heard about the Brooklyn docks. Many Italians came to America looking for work, some illegally. The play was written in the 1950s, when Miller himself refused to name others to a government committee, so betrayal mattered deeply to him.

## Form and structure

- A modern **tragedy**, using ideas from Greek **tragedy**: a narrator like a **chorus**, a hero with a fatal flaw, and a sense from the start that the ending can't be avoided.
- Tension builds through confrontations: the boxing lesson, Marco lifting the chair, and the final fight.

## Key quotations

- Alfieri says that most of the time now people "settle for half", unlike Eddie, who gave himself completely, which led to his death.

## Key terms

| | |
|---|---|
| **Tragedy** | A play in which a great character's flaw leads to their downfall and death. |
| **Chorus** | In Greek drama, a character or group who comments on the action, like Alfieri. |
| **Fatal flaw** | The weakness that causes a tragic hero's downfall. |
| **Submarine** | In the play, an immigrant who has entered the country illegally. |
| **Honour** | A person's good name and reputation in their community. |

## Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Where is A View from the Bridge set?
2. What is Eddie's job?
3. Who narrates the play?
4. Where do Marco and Rodolpho come from?
5. Why does Marco need to work in America?
6. Which skills does Eddie use to mock Rodolpho's manliness?
7. What does Eddie do that breaks the community's code?
8. What does Marco do to show his strength and warn Eddie?

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### Answers

1. Red Hook, Brooklyn, New York
2. A dock worker (longshoreman)
3. Alfieri, a lawyer
4. Sicily
5. To send money to his starving family
6. Singing, cooking and sewing
7. Reports the cousins to the Immigration Bureau
8. Lifts a chair by one leg

## What to do next

**Practise 10 questions on this topic**

**Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes**

**Read the lesson, one step at a time**

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