A Study Guide for GCSE English Literature
OUTLINE OF THE PLOT

The events of the play occur in about 1950 in Red Hook, a part of Brooklyn, New York. It is a poor community, consisting mainly of Italian immigrants who rely on working at the docks for their livelihood. Alfieri, a lawyer who was also born in Italy, is the audience’s guide to the events in Red Hook as he tells the story of Eddie Carbone.

Eddie is a longshoreman who works at the dock. He returns home to tell his wife Beatrice that her cousins (illegal immigrants) have arrived from Italy, earlier than expected. He in turn is shocked and upset by the news that his niece Catherine has been offered a job as a stenographer. When the immigrants, Marco and Rodolfo, arrive Eddie finds Rodolfo’s appearance and behaviour disturbing. Catherine on the other hand is attracted to him.

Some weeks pass before Alfieri introduces the next scene. During this time Rodolfo and Catherine’s relationship has developed and Eddie fumes whilst waiting for them to return from the cinema. He gives two reasons for opposing the relationship: not only is Rodolfo ‘weird’, but he is looking to gain American citizenship by marrying Catherine. Beatrice hints at another reason when she tells Catherine to be careful of the way she acts before Eddie.

After an unsuccessful meeting with Alfieri, Eddie deliberately provokes a confrontation, pretending to teach Rodolfo to box, and thereby imposing his power. Marco warns Eddie to leave his brother alone by asserting his strength in a chair lifting competition.

Eddie is now so obsessed with keeping Rodolfo away from Catherine at all costs that he begins to act wildly and self-destructively.

At Christmas, drunk, he comes across them together and kisses Catherine passionately and Rodolfo in violent mockery. The result of course, is to confirm their plans to marry and make certain that Eddie loses Catherine.

At this point Eddie, after another failed talk with Alfieri, calls the immigration bureau. He wants Rodolfo out of the way and does not care who else suffers i.e. Marco and the other two ‘submarines’ on the same block. Before the officers come Beatrice finally talks frankly about Eddie’s sexual failures. With the arrests Eddie becomes an outcast, a traitor to his family and the community, and Marco publicly spits in his face.

Rodolfo and Catherine are to be married; he will become an American. Before the wedding however, Marco ignores the persuasion of Alfieri, Rodolfo and Catherine and comes to challenge Eddie. In the Fight Eddie draws a knife. The unarmed Marco turns the blade back into him and Eddie dies.

Eddie Carbone

Eddie is the central character of the play, the tragedy happens to him, but is he the hero of the play? A tragic hero is someone who is basically a good, decent person, but has one ‘fatal flaw’ in their character that leads to their downfall. In Eddie’s case it could be his possessive love for Catherine. Alfieri says that he is ‘pure’ - not purely good, but at least purely himself. Eddie has a code of honour, but breaks it to live by his obsession.
He betrays his family and his community by calling immigration because he truly believes that what he is trying to do (ie. Stop the wedding) is right.

He is Catherine’s uncle and has undoubtedly, until this point, behaved as a father and a friend to her, but what exactly does he feel towards her? There is no doubt that he has too much love, and that he wishes to be protective of her, but you need to consider how much of his opposition to Rodolfo is due to a belief that he is unsuitable and how much is sexual jealousy. Eddie has convinced himself that he is acting honourably, but is he simply blind to his own motives? He can’t admit them, even to himself.

Eddie exists very much as part of a community that gives him strength at first, and brings about his destruction later. He is uneducated and hard working, he has a simple set of standards and a simple code of honour. He knows that ‘real men’ don’t sing in high voices and make dresses. Real men also don’t telephone immigration.

Once he has lost his honour, his name, his reputation before the Liparis and others, Eddie is finished.

Arthur Millar did not intend for Eddie to be portrayed as some sick incestuous paedophile. Eddie is a character who is confused by his own feelings, but always tries to do what he believes is right. His main concern is Catherine, he wants her to be happy and he simply cannot that Rodolfo will make her happy in the long run.

He becomes increasingly desperate at the thought of losing her and his frustration at what he sees as the law letting him down leads him to his desperate actions.
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Beatrice

Beatrice is a simple and good woman whose problems don’t seem as important as the major tragedy of the play. Her problems are domestic and martial, but they are put aside as the Eddie/Catherine/Rodolfo/Marco tragedy works itself out. It is worth considering what Beatrice’s problems are and whether they are her own fault in any way. Does Beatrice accept too much? What could she have done to avoid the situation? She makes attempts to help, but they are always too late.

Beatrice becomes involved in events that are too much for her to deal with, in emotions too violent for her to possess, but what about her own standards and opinions? We are told very little of them. She is not a fully rounded character, she is there to tell us more about Eddie.

Beatrice at first seems to have potential as a comic character. Her confusions and panics over tablecloths and supper, plus her banter with her husband are the stuff of many a sit-com wife. But any hint of humour soon disappears; Beatrice’s role in the play is to suffer.

Find quotes in the play to support the facts that:

- Beatrice gets flustered very easily.
- She is very concerned about the appearance of her house.
- She is very kind and generous to her family.
- She wants to keep Eddie happy.
- She suspects that Eddie will not be too happy about Catherine’s job.
- Beatrice tries to convince Eddie to let Catherine take the job.
- She is worried about how protective Eddie is.
- She tried to encourage Catherine to think for herself.
- She denies that she is angry with Eddie.
- Beatrice likes Rodolfo and doesn’t understand the problem Eddie has with him.
- Beatrice doesn’t feel close to Eddie.
- She gets angry with his refusal to allow Catherine some freedom.
- Beatrice tries to convince Catherine to act a little older.
- Beatrice is quite perceptive, she tries to explain the situation to Catherine.
- She is very concerned about Marco’s financial situation.
- Beatrice criticises Eddie’s relationship with Eddie, she suspects.
- Beatrice tries to protect Rodolfo and Catherine from Eddie’s criticism.
- Beatrice is a bit naïve and idealistic, she trusts Eddie in the boxing match, she still concentrates on the good in him.
- She grows to regret ever allowing the cousins to stay.
- She wants to put it behind them and pretend it never happened.
- Beatrice acts as a peacemaker.
- Beatrice senses immediately it is Eddie who has betrayed the Italians—her opinion of him has degenerated during the play.
- Beatrice also knows that Eddie is not the only one to blame for the situation.
- Beatrice loves Eddie until the very end.
- It is Beatrice who finally speaks aloud what we have suspected about Eddie’s feelings for Catherine.
- Beatrice tries to protect Eddie to prevent him from going to meet Marco.
Catherine

Catherine begins the play in all innocence; she is ready to accept people for what they appear to be, she sees no danger. She is dutiful and loving to her elders, she only thinks of taking a job because the principle advises it, she happily waves at Louis, despite Eddie’s warnings.

In many Catherine still acts like a little girl, but it is possible to find examples of her growing sexual maturity: look at evidence in her appearance and the way of dressing. Even so, her first sight of Rodolfo brings wonder and delight. A crucial scene in her development is the progress from doubt to love at the beginning of Act Two.

The question that Arthur Miller makes us ask ourselves is, ‘What makes such a sweet obedient trusting girl defy Eddie as she does?’ There are many answers: the power of love, simply growing up, but you should consider which of Eddie’s actions are responsible?

Does he back her into a corner until she has no alternative? –– Would Catherine have arranged such a hasty marriage to Rodolfo if Eddie hadn’t tried to stand in her way? Indeed would she have fallen so totally in love with him (and all he represents, freedom & fun) if Eddie had allowed her a little more freedom prior to the cousins arrival?

To understand the development of Catherine’s feelings you should compare her outburst on p61 (‘in the garbage you belong’) with her lst words in the play as Eddie dies. Has she really changed that much? She certainly still feels a lot of love for Eddie, but she has learnt the need for her to assert her own independence in thought and action.

Tasks on Catherine
Find evidence from the play to prove that:

- Catherine acts very childishly in front of Eddie.
- She craves his approval.
- Catherine is easily upset when she feels she has displeased Eddie.
- She thinks that Eddie will be pleased about her job.
- She is devastated when he hints she will forget about them.
- She is stunned when she hears the story of Vinny Bolzano.
- She is awestruck the first time she sees Rodolfo.
- She is very impressed with his singing.
- Catherine can’t understand Eddie’s dislike of Rodolfo.
- She refuses to believe Eddie’s excuse that Rodolfo wants American citizenship.
- She still wants to please Eddie.
- She comes to realise that she must act older in front of Eddie.
- She asks Rodolfo to dance as an act of rebellion.
- She tests Rodolfo, trying to find out if he would still marry her if they were to live in Italy.
- She grows frightened of Eddie.
- She clearly loves Rodolfo very much.
- She chooses to go with Rodolfo when Eddie pushes her.
- She is furious when Eddies kisses Rodolfo.
She is desperate to protect Rodolfo from the immigration officers.
She makes the break and turns against Eddie.
She is horrified when Beatrice suggests the real reason for Eddie’s actions.
She never stops loving Eddie.

Marco

Of all the characters in the play Marco is the one who is revealed most by his actions, not his words. He has very few lines to say, and speaks in short sentences. He is like Eddie, drawn by his belief in a code of behaviour, in traditional standards of right and wrong. Eddie has done wrong by betraying his family and in Marco’s eyes it is up to him to restore honour to the family by gaining revenge. In Marco’s case he follows the code purely and totally and, as a result, a respectable working man becomes a murderer.

Marco always acts correctly. To begin with, he is ready to act exactly as Eddie wishes: he is grateful to the Carbones. Marco’s silence and correctness are a striking contrast to Rodolfo and he seems to have more in common with Eddie, but when family honour is at stake, he has to assert himself in the chair lifting incident.

In this strong silent and dedicated character, Arthur Miller manages to make a killer whom we can see as good and honourable. This is helped by the fact that every passing reference shows the respect that everyone has for Marco (see Louis and Mike p25)

Tasks on Marco

Find evidence in the play to support the fact that:

- Marco is very respectful towards Eddie to begin with.
- He is willing to do any work to support his family.
- He is very proud of his wife.
- He is very grateful to Eddie for giving him this opportunity.
- Marco is realistic and tries to control Rodolfo’s exaggerations.
- Mike is very impressed with Marco’s strength.
- Marco tries to bridge the increasing gap between Rodolfo and Eddie.
- As soon as Eddie insults Rodolfo during the boxing practice Marco feels the need to prove his strength and authority, defending his family’s honour.
- Marco indicates his suspicion that it is Eddie who betrayed them by spitting in his face.
- Marco accuses him in front of the community.
- He believes that Eddie has indirectly injured his family by denying him the opportunity to work in America.
- Marco is glad that at least Rodolfo has a chance of staying by marrying Catherine.
- Marco cannot understand American justice when Alfieri tried to explain it.
- Marco never promises not to harm Eddie – he would not break his word.
- Marco refuses to apologise to Eddie – his honour means everything to him.

Rodolfo

Like most of the characters in the play Rodolfo goes on a journey within himself. At the beginning he is clearly immature and loves telling tall stories, making himself the centre of attention and treating American society like a typical young consumer.

By the end he has taken responsibility for Catherine and in a way reversed roles with Marco, trying to persuade him to be sensible. Rodolfo will become an American, and already he is less Italian than his brother.

At the end of the play he is the one who will settle for half and will accept blame simply to avert bloodshed.

The problem about Rodolfo’s character is deciding if there is any truth in Eddie’s criticism. Eddie accuses him of not being normal, implying homosexuality. Of course, plenty of heterosexual men sing in high voices and can cook and sew, but Louis and Mike find him odd. Do we trust Louis and Mike’s opinion? What about the accusation of using Catherine as his passport to citizenship? Is that really an important issue in the play?

Tasks on Rodolfo

Find evidence in the play to support the fact that:

- Rodolfo is very excited to be in America.
- Rodolfo is pretty contemptuous of Italian life.
- Rodolfo wants to stay in America permanently.
- He has a tendency to exaggerate.
- He flirts with Catherine.
- He tries to be friendly to Eddie.
- He asks outright what he has done wrong to offend Eddie.
- He needs persuading to dance with Catherine, he does not want her to go to Italy.
- He does have his pride, he will not accept being insulted by Eddie.
- He understands Eddie's protective nature and tries to explain to Catherine that it is wrong.
- He does have his pride, he will not accept being insulted by Eddie.
- He understands Eddie's protective nature and tries to explain to Catherine that it is wrong.
- He defends Catherine from Eddie.
- He tries to convince Marco to accept American law and not kill Eddie.
- He warns Eddie that Marco is out looking for him.
- He tries to make peace between Eddie and Marco - he does not want any bloodshed.

**Alfieri**

We are told that Alfieri is in his fifties and lived in Italy until he was twenty-five. We also find out that he has certain views on the characters in the play: for instance he loves Eddie more than his more sensible clients. He is also an Italian who (through time and education) has learnt to accept and understand American laws (unlike Eddie and Marco). He has short scenes with Eddie and Marco, but his sensible talk means nothing to them. His serious and educated language serves as a contrast to Eddie's somewhat uncontrollable and disjointed speech. Whilst Eddie finds it hard to express himself Alfieri is eloquent. But can we see him as a character himself? He is not really a part of the drama, he doesn't affect the storyline, but he is the audience's link with the drama. His role is that of the chorus, as in a Greek tragedy.

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**GREEK TRAGEDY AND ALFIERI’S ROLE**

Greek tragedies had a single storyline, a single setting and continuous time. Miller managed the first, and just about the second, but he needed help with the third. His plot had to unfold over a number of months. He managed this with clever use of the chorus.

In a Greek tragedy the chorus was a group of anonymous citizens who performed many roles:

1. Informed the audience of the events before the play.
2. Narrated off-stage happenings.
3. Commented on the characters.
4. Told the audience what to think (or at least hinted at it).
5. Often even told the audience what was going to happen.

Alfieri takes the place of this group of people. At one time or another he performs all of the functions of the chorus.
Tasks on Alfieri
Find evidence from the play to prove that:

- He was born in Italy.
- He introduces us to the setting of the play.
- He introduces us to Eddie.
- He thinks that Eddie is a good man.
- He tells us that Eddie has a destiny—his future is mapped out.
- He is already connected with the Carbone family.
- He only deals with American laws.
- He is sensible and reasonable.
- That he first plants the idea of phoning immigration in Eddie’s head.
- He tries to help Eddie by advising him.
- He knows that it will all end in disaster.
- He knows how things work at the docks.
- He feels helpless when dealing with Eddie, he knows he cannot alter things.
- He tries to explain the law to Eddie.
- He knows what Eddie is going to do and tries to stop him by warning him.
- He tries to explain the law to Marco.
- He has respect for Eddie because Eddie was true to himself and stood up for what he believed in.

Tony, Louis, Mike and the Liparis.

In ‘A View from the Bridge’ there are five characters in a tragic conflict and one commentator. There are also an unusual amount of tiny parts, some of them non-speaking. These have no impact as individuals but considerable importance as a group.

Maintaining the code of society and keeping a good name before the world are crucial to people like Eddie and Marco, so the non-speaking Liparis matter. Eddie has betrayed their relatives as much as he has Beatrice’s and their brief appearance marks him down as an outcast, just like Vinny Bolzano. Tony represents the syndicate, Louis and Mike are Eddie’s neighbours and co-workers who share his prejudice against Rodolfo.
**DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE PLAY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTER</th>
<th>MOVES FROM BEING:</th>
<th>TO BEING:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CATHERINE</td>
<td>INNOCENT OBEDIENT TRUSTING</td>
<td>MATURE RESPONSIBLE FOR HER ACTIONS DETERMINED TO THINK FOR HERSELF</td>
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<td>BEATRICE</td>
<td>NAIVE INNOCENT IDEALISTIC</td>
<td>PERCEPTIVE DESPERATE UNDERSTANDING OF EDDIE</td>
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<tr>
<td>RODOLFO</td>
<td>IRRESPONSIBLE CAREFREE PROTECTED BY MARCO</td>
<td>RESPONSIBLE RATIONAL PROTECTIVE OF MARCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCO</td>
<td>RESPONSIBLE RESPECTFUL STRONG SILENT</td>
<td>PROUD VENGEFUL FURIOUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDDIE</td>
<td>CONTAINED BOTTLED UP IN CONTROL PART OF COMMUNITY</td>
<td>OUT OF CONTROL CAN'T CONTROL HIS FEELINGS DESPERATE SCARED OUTCAST FROM COMMUNITY</td>
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**Themes in 'A View from the Bridge'**

**Love**

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Eddie</th>
<th>Catherine</th>
<th>Rodolfo</th>
<th>Marco</th>
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<tr>
<td>Marital</td>
<td>Parental / Obsessive</td>
<td>Romantic love</td>
<td>Brotherly love</td>
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- Love brings about the actions in the play; it is love, not hate that fuels the violence.
- There are question marks about the two central loving relationships: Eddie & Catherine and Catherine & Rodolfo.
• Catherine loves Eddie as a daughter, but what is the nature of his love for her?
• Is Rodolfo as devoted to her as she is to him?
• It is love that creates Beatrice’s problems – she loves Eddie, but that brings her into conflict with Catherine and her cousins, whom she also loves.
• Marco’s actions are directed by love, he comes to the U.S.A. to earn money for his wife and children. It is his love for his brother that provokes him to anger later in the play.

Family

• Family loyalty is very important; Beatrice to her cousins, Marco to his wife and Rodolfo, the Liparis to their relatives.
• Don’t forget these characters originated from Sicily, the home of the Mafia, where family loyalty is very important.
• The Mafia believe that the law is useless and ‘direct justice’ (an eye for an eye) is better.
• In the Mafia family members are protected eg. The mysterious ‘they’ who organise the illegal immigration and provide work for the ‘submarines’ until they have repaid their debts.
• Those who betray the family are dealt with ruthlessly, they have broken a ‘code’, a ‘rule of behaviour’ eg. Vinny Bolzano. They are also seen to have betrayed the whole community.

Honour

• Because of the emphasis on the family loyalty within the community, honour (or pride, dignity) must be maintained.
• Insults to the family must be avenged that is the motivation for both Marco and Eddie.
• When Marco spits at Eddie he is disgracing him.
• One of the reasons Eddie dislikes Rodolfo is that the other workers laugh at him, an insult to Eddie and his family.
• Eddie also needs his personal honour, which Marco removes when he spits at him. His personal honour is symbolised by his name, ‘I want my name Marco’.

Justice and the Law

• Justice and the law are two separate things and the play deals with the conflict between them.
• Remember we are dealing with Italian immigrants, they do not believe in the law.
• Alfieri’s attempts to explain the law both to Eddie and Marco fail.
• Both characters are shocked and frustrated when they find out that the law does not support them; Eddie when he wants to stop Rodolfo from marrying Catherine and Marco when he wants revenge on Eddie.
• What they see as the noble and honourable course of action (preventing marriage, avenging family dishonour) is in fact not within the law. The law therefore goes against their traditional codes of honour.
This is a community living by its own laws within a nation living by orthodox (proper) laws.
Eddie has the power to go against the rules of his community and phone immigration but when his actions are revealed he dies because of Marco’s code of honour.

In the Exam

- In the exam you will have to answer two questions on ‘A View from the Bridge’ in the space of an hour.

- For the first question you are usually given an extract from the play. You will be asked to comment on certain aspects of it, (e.g. What do you learn about the characters from the passage?)

- It is important to take into consideration stage directions (given in italics) and how the characters say their lines, as well as what they say. Often, actions speak louder than words.

- You should only spend twenty minutes on this question. Use five minutes to read through, highlighting / underlining important, revealing quotes that you will need to use in your answer. The remaining fifteen minutes should be spent aiming to write an answer of approximately one page.

- For the second question you may or may not be given a choice of essay titles. Read through them at least twice so that you choose the one that you feel most confident about.

- Spend five minutes planning your essay, using a spider diagram or paragraph plan. It will speed up your writing if you spend five minutes now thinking about what will go in each paragraph.

- As a guide, you should have at least four paragraphs to your essay, each making a different point or showing a change (see over for examples of essay plans).

- Remember, if your essay is on how a character or relationship develops throughout the play you must choose quotes / incidents from the beginning, middle and end of the play.

- Using quotes to support your essay, you will have thirty-five minutes to write approximately 1 1/2 to 2 sides.
PAST ESSAY QUESTION WITH EXAMPLES OF PLANS

Q: Imagine an inquest were to be held to investigate the circumstances of Eddie Carbone’s death. What evidence could be found in the play to support a claim that he was responsible for his own death.

Intro - Eddie is a good man deep down as Alfierie points out, but I think his death was really his own fault for a number of reasons:

Overprotective of Catherine at first, then allows his feelings to develop into something they shouldn’t.

Can’t express his feelings or admit them himself, keeps everything bottled up – it has to explode sooner or later.

Desperation leads him to self-destructive actions (kissing Catherine and Rodolfo) - he forces Catherine into leaving when he kicks Rodolfo out.

Phoning immigration (betraying his own code of loyalty) when he knows that Marco is a man of honour and will not take the betrayal.

It is he that draws the knife, Marco came to the fight unarmed.

Q: What do you think of Marco and the way he is presented?

You should think about:
His relationship with other characters.
Why he behaves as he does.
The way he speaks and behaves.
The way an audience may react to him.
Intro - Arthur Miller trying to create a killer / murderer that the audience felt sympathy for.

Relationships -
*respectful to Eddie to start of with, Eddie appreciates this and starts to talk only to Marco.
*looks after Rodolfo - it is Eddie’s criticism of him that provokes Marco to challenge him in the chair-lifting competition.
*Louis and Mike respect Marco’s strength and working ability.

Why he behaves -
*Marco’s main motivation for coming to America is to provide for his wife and children.
*He (like Eddie) has a strong code of honour. Family honour means everything to him, he will not let anyone criticise them - see chair-lifting / argument in the street.

The way he speaks -
*Very responsible and mature.
*Controlled speech, does not over exaggerate, opposite to Rodolfo.
*Strong, silent type, until he is provoked - determined and proud.

The way the audience... -
*sympathetic because we know how much his family pride means to him?
Write your own essay plans for the following questions:

Q: Remind yourself of the conversation between Beatrice and Catherine in Act One, where Beatrice warns Catherine of her behaviour with Eddie. To what extent do you think Catherine is to blame for the eventual outcome?

Q: Remind yourself of the first time we meet Alfieri at the beginning of Act One. Why do you think Arthur Miller included the character of Mr. Alfieri in the play? Think about:

- His role as a character and his relationship with Eddie.
- His role as a commentator.
- The way he speaks and behaves.

Q: Compare and contrast the characters of Eddie and Marco. You may like to consider:

- Their beliefs.
- Why they act the way they do.
- Their personalities.
- The way they are viewed by other characters.

Q: There are many emotions in this play: love; hatred; jealousy; anger. Write about one of these emotions and how it is presented in 'A View from the Bridge'.