

TSSMTM
Creating VCE Success

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“A View From The Bridge”

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SAMPLE

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AREA 1:

READING & THE STUDY OF TEXTS:

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

Chapter 1 GENRE

A View from the Bridge is a modern urban tragedy.

A tragedy, as defined by Aristotle, and evidenced in the Ancient Greek tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides of the 5th Century BCE, usually adheres to a recognisable pattern: the protagonist commits an offence, often unknowingly. This offence normally occurs through a tragic flaw or weakness in the character who would otherwise be considered a great man. The dénouement normally results in the protagonist being punished for his errors, but when he accepts his fate, he understands what it was that brought about his downfall in the first place.

In Ancient Greek theatre, the protagonist was usually a king or great nobleman, and his transgression, once punished, restored the moral order of the universe. The audience, seeing a great man brought down to the lowest point, experiences a moment of catharsis, which forces it to recognise humility in their own lives and to adhere to the moral order.

Miller has consciously alluded to the conventions of Ancient Greek tragedy in the composition of *A View from the Bridge*, but he has adapted the conventions of tragedy to suit his purpose. Eddie Carbone is not a king or nobleman, but rather, he is a longshoreman, a job Miller has chosen to be representative of a community of second generation immigrants who form one section of a poor and struggling working class. In this way, Eddie is to be seen as an 'Everyman'; what critics about this time started calling an anti-hero (a term used to characterise the 'ordinary, run-of-the-mill' protagonists of 20th Century drama that stood in place of the 'extra-ordinary elite' protagonists of previous centuries). Miller has also not rendered Eddie Carbone a 'great man', but he is certainly an amiable, decent, hard-working individual; however, in line with the protagonists of Ancient Greek tragedy, Eddie has a flaw that will lead him to behave wrongly, and this will bring about his downfall.

Miller continues the allusion to Ancient Greek tragedy with the inclusion of Alfieri, who acts as a type of Chorus, (whose traditional role in Greek theatre was to provide a moral commentary on the events of the play). Miller also pays homage to the ineluctable hand of fate that runs throughout Ancient Greek tragedy by having the events told in the past, which emphasises the inevitability of what Eddie brings down around him.

Chapter 2

STRUCTURE

The play consists of two Acts, and this in itself provides a symmetry that can be used as a focal point to examine Eddie's transformation from a respectable hard-working family man to a disgraced and obsessed individual.

Each Act can be divided further according to the action, but it is interesting that Alfieri often provides a narrative interlude between episodes, and it is Alfieri who provides the prologue and the epilogue to the play. In this way, Alfieri can stand outside of events, whilst still remaining part of the play; unlike the other characters, he can directly address the audience about the events that have happened, inviting it to 'watch it run its bloody course'. This reminds the audience that the events of the story have already unfolded, emphasising the inevitability of what happens, and Alfieri's interludes provide a moral commentary on the events as they unfold in a way reminiscent of the Chorus in Greek tragedy. By doing this, Miller moves the focus away from what happens in the play to focus on how the characters unfold – with each new event primarily unraveling a new aspect of the characters; especially Eddie.

The symmetrical structure of the play also supports the idea of fated events, which, if not predestined, are inevitable. The following outline draws attention to this carefully balanced structure of the play:

Act One

- **Prologue:** (Spoken by Alfieri); pp. 11 - 13
- **Episode 1:** Eddie, Catherine and Beatrice look forward to the arrival of Beatrice's cousins; pp. 13 - 25
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); p. 26
- **Episode 2:** Later the same evening the cousins arrive; pp. 26-33
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); pp. 33 - 34
- **Episode 3:** Some weeks later Catherine and Rodolpho are getting closer to each other pp. 35 - 45
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); p. 45
- **Episode 4:** Eddie consults Alfieri; pp. 45-49
- **Interlude:** (Alfieri); pp. 49 - 50
- **Episode 5:** A domestic scene; dancing, boxing, chair-lifting; pp. 50 - 58