

Roundabout Theatre Company

A View from the Bridge

From Page To Stage Production Guide

A View ^{from} the Bridge

by **Arthur Miller**

directed by **Michael Mayer**

Major support provided by *The Laura Pels Foundation*

PRODUCTION GUIDE

written by

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WHAT IS THE PLAY ABOUT?

"Eddie is still not a man to weep over; the play does not attempt to swamp an audience in tears. But it is more possible now to relate his actions to our own and thus to understand ourselves a little better not only as isolated psychological entities, but as we connect to our fellows and our long past together."

- Arthur Miller, 1960

The view in *A View from the Bridge* is one that is blurred by tension. A tension that exists primarily because the play is suspended between two theatrical styles; looking back at the classical theatre of Greece and ahead toward a new kind of social drama. Miller created a new social drama with this play by investigating what happens when a man is between conditions. With *A View from the Bridge*, he offers up questions and allows the audience to sit in that in between place, on a bridge, as it were, so that new ideas can be formed about the human condition.

The plot structure of the play is framed, as in a Greek tragedy, by the chorus. Alfieri, an attorney from Red Hook, delivers the lines in the prologue that set up the structure for the oncoming action; he informs us of the current situation, but also, rather nostalgically, harkens back to another time: "This is Red Hook, not Sicily. This is the slum that faces the bay on the seaward side of the Brooklyn Bridge...in Calabria perhaps or on the cliff at Syracuse, another lawyer quite differently dressed, heard the same complaint and sat there as powerless as I, and watched it run its bloody course." This passage stresses Alfieri's knowledge of the inevitability of the action. There is going to be a bloody ending and there is nothing that anyone can do about it.

The characters are also caught between two places. Eddie Carbone is an Italian immigrant and a longshoreman who works on the docks in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge. But when it comes to defending his pride and acting on his passionate impulses, his actions are broad and larger than his community can

handle. Miller noted, "once Eddie had been placed squarely in his social context, among his people, the mythlike feeling of the story emerged of itself". Eddie vehemently tries to keep his niece Catherine from becoming a young woman; she is caught in that difficult place between adolescence and adulthood and Eddie wedges himself between her and any steps she can take toward growing up and leaving home. Marco and Rodolpho, the Italian immigrants visiting the Carbone's are between Italy and America. In Eddie's eyes, Rodolpho is between genders—Eddie remarks "He's like a weird. And with that whacky hair; he's like a chorus girl or sup'm." Alfieri is both within the play as well as outside of the action. And Eddie is caught between all of these people, unable to assert his position to any positive affect.

The tension that is created when something exists between two forms is also apparent in the personal and familial relationships in the play. Eddie's struggle with masculinity constitutes part of his tragic flaw: that which lends him an air of the tragic protagonist but which also makes him human. He is caught in his role as father to his niece Catherine, but harbors sexual feelings for her and resists her love for blond-haired Italian Rodolpho. He is an important member of his community in Red Hook, but he remains an immigrant in the eyes of the larger American society. In reaction to his caught and suspended position between all of these things, Eddie reacts passionately but not logically. He is powerless to stop the onslaught of emotions that creates his downfall. Like a Greek tragedy, Eddie's fate is in the hands of the Gods. The laws of man are ineffective here but the Red Hook community is still standing in judgment.

"Modern drama, Miller thinks, has lost the ability to deal with the whole man. What is needed is a new social drama which will combine the approach of the Greek theatre with modern discoveries in psychology and economics". *A View From The Bridge* shows us a man standing in the face of his community, whose values, ways and beliefs constitute a palpable emotional force. By presenting this story from a distanced objective viewpoint, Miller allows us to stand on the bridge and decide which way to lean.

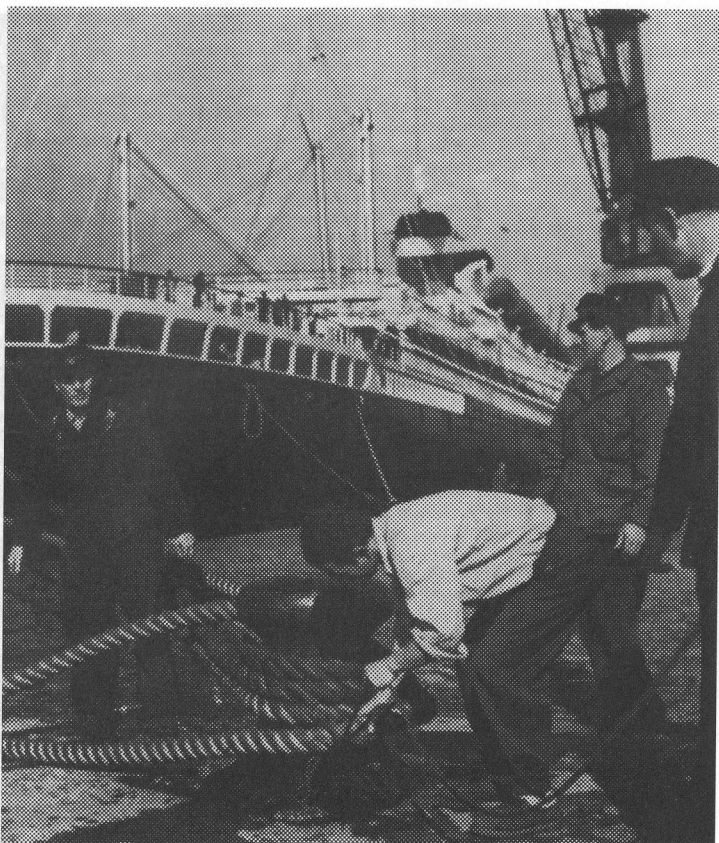
WHO'S WHO

EDDIE CARBONE (played by Anthony LaPaglia): A 40 year-old, husky, slightly overweight longshoreman, who leads a hard, even and steady life. He is traditional and family-oriented and does not welcome change. Eddie has very strong feelings which he does not and cannot express because he does not understand them.

BEATRICE CARBONE (played by Allison Janney): Eddie's wife. She is a warm, generous and kind woman who gives her heart to everyone and everything, but is frustrated and annoyed with her husband's constant attention to and preoccupation with their niece.

CATHERINE (played by Brittany Murphy): Eddie and Bea's niece. She is 17 years old, friendly and likes people. She is ready and eager to grow up, get a job and move out. Catherine is very sensitive to the feelings of her uncle, Eddie, but is slightly alarmed by his overprotective hold on her.

MARCO (played by Adam Trese): Bea's cousin. He is a hard-working illegal immigrant from a small poor village in Italy, who came to America to work and send money home to his wife and three children. He is a square-built peasant of 32, suspicious and quiet-voiced.



RODOLPHO (played by Gabriel Olds): Marco's younger brother, also an illegal immigrant, came to America to make some money. He is an unusually blonde Italian who knows how to sing, cook and sew -- which causes Eddie to question Rodolpho's sexuality.

MR. ALFIERI (played by Stephen Spinella): A lawyer who is essentially the narrator of the play. He has an outsider's point of view when talking to the audience, but is also a participating character in the play.

LOUIS AND MIKE (played by Daniel Serafini-Sauli and Mark Zeisler): Longshoremen (dock workers) of Italian descent. They are regular guys -- men's men.

MR. AND MRS. LIPARI (played by Jerry Marino, Jr. and Elaine Formicola): Neighbors of the Carbones', who live above them in the same building. They are also housing illegal immigrants.

FIRST AND SECOND IMMIGRATION OFFICERS (played by John Spredakos and Christian Lincoln): Officials who do their job as it is supposed to be done, without feelings or exceptions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR Arthur Miller (1915 - present)

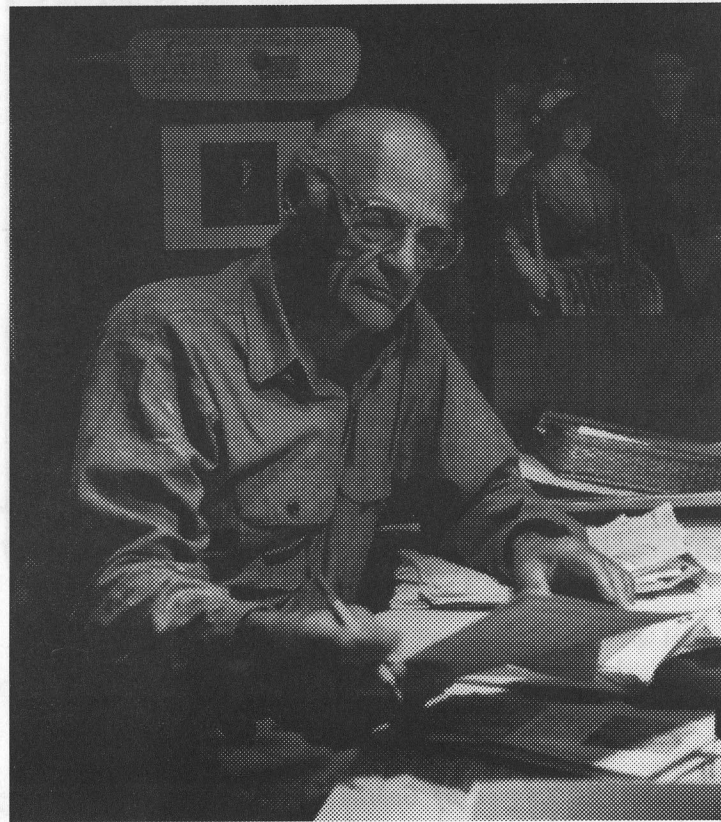


Photo by Inge Morath, Magnum Photos, Inc.

Arthur Miller's life story is a typical history of twentieth century America. His father, a Jewish immigrant from Poland, worked his way up from nothing and built a prosperous business. As a boy Miller enjoyed the prosperity of the 1920's and as a young man he endured the trials of the Great Depression. Although his first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All The Luck*, was a failure, *All My Sons*, produced in 1947, established Miller as a promising new dramatist. His next play, *Death of a Salesman*, produced in 1949, won him a Pulitzer Prize and established his reputation as one of the three greatest twentieth century American playwrights, alongside Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams. "Miller has written plays in every decade of this century since the 1930's," writes Christopher Bigsby in the introduction to *The Portable Arthur Miller*. "They add up to an alternative history of a troubled century. It is a history told through the lives of those who have endeavored to make sense of themselves as much as of the period in which they have lived."

Now in his eighties, Arthur Miller continues to make vital contributions to American theatre. In addition to his full-length plays, his work encompasses two novels, an autobiography, numerous short stories, essays, one-act plays, travel journals, screenplays and plays for television. Most recently, he created a new film adaptation of his play *The Crucible*. Upon studying Arthur Miller's work, we have to consider why, after fifty years, his work is still read in every high school, produced on six continents and repeatedly adapted to film. Even Miller admits, "I'm wondering how come I'm still around."

Part of the reason may be Miller's dedication to creating great works that enlighten us to the truths of humanity that are "already known but unrecognized as such." He has been described as an "advocate for the integrity and humanity of man" whose work is "a campaign for a tolerant society."

"It is within the rightful sphere of the drama . . . to embrace the many-sidedness of man. It is as close to being a total art as the race has invented. It can tell, like science, what is - but more, it can tell what ought to be. It can depict, like painting, in designs and portraits, in colors of the day or night; like the novel it can spread out its arms and tell the story of a life, or a city, in a few hours - but more, it is dynamic, it is always on the move as life is, and it is perceived like life through the motions, the gestures, the tones of voice, and the gait and nuance of living people. It is the singer's art and the painter's art and the dancer's art, yet it may hew to fact no less tenaciously than does the economist or the physician. In a word, there lies within in the dramatic form the ultimate possibility of raising the truth-consciousness of mankind to a level of such intensity as to transform those who observe it."

- Arthur Miller, *The Family in Modern Drama*, 1956

IS EVERYONE HAPPY? Miller's View of Life in the 1950's

Arthur Miller has been a "classic" for along time. Perhaps he would rather not be. According to Mark Twain, after all, a classic is a book which people praise but don't read. Having conferred this status upon him (whether he like it or not), we tend to forget that Mr. Miller has always been something of a rebel.

A little background: When he had his first theatrical success, with *All My Sons* in 1947, America was in the first flush of an economic boom unparalleled in human memory. We had emerged from World War II as the strongest, richest country in the free world. Now there actually *could* be two cars in every garage (there could also be a garage), a big, shiny refrigerator in every kitchen, and soon, in every living room, a



A typical 1950's family scene.

television. Suburbs were being built, as were the freeways to get us there. The G.I. Bill was sending thousands of people to college; there was a job, it seemed, for everyone (or every man, anyway) who wanted one. To a people who had undergone privation during the Depression and shortages of every sort during the War, it seemed as if Paradise had arrived. With Paradise came complacency. To be an American was a great thing, indeed: hadn't the powerful publisher of *Time* magazine, Henry Luce, declared that the American Century was at hand?

At the same time happiness was declared, the Cold War was nearing its height, and the real possibility of nuclear war entered America's consciousness. Bombshelters appeared in back yards, air raid drills were staged at schools, and Godzilla and his monster brethren, representing nature's forces run amok, debuted in the movies. The country was engulfed in a Communist hysteria so powerful that the mere suggestion that a person *might* have attended *one* meeting at which some *possible* Communists *might* have been present was enough to ruin his or career. Indeed, hundreds of career *were* ruined. Many whose careers were safe pretended not to notice.

The Broadway theatre (which, for all intents and purposes was the American theatre) largely ignored these stresses and focused either on the successes of the American adventure, or the private problems of individuals. The notion that the theatre could and should play a part in America's social concerns, a notion which had been quite strong in the 1930's, was put out to pasture. But not in Arthur Miller's pasture. In 1952, as McCarthyism reached its full-throated frenzy (we name the hysteria after one man, but as Mr. Miller would be the first to point

See HAPPY? on the last page

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Man Who Had All the Luck 1944

All My Sons 1947

Death of a Salesman 1949

An Enemy of the People 1950

(Adaptation of Ibsen's play)

The Crucible 1953

A View from the Bridge 1955

A Memory of Two Mondays 1955

The Misfits (Screenplay) 1961

After the Fall 1964

Incident at Vichy 1964

The Price 1968

The Creation of the World and Other Business 1972

The American Clock 1979

"Playing for Time" (Teleplay) 1980

The Archbishop's Ceiling 1986

Danger: Memory 1987

The Ride Down Mt. Morgan 1992

The Last Yankee 1993

Broken Glass 1994

The Crucible (Screenplay) 1996

Red Hook, Brooklyn in the 1950's

"Red Hook, in South Brooklyn, was a nice little Italian neighborhood near the Gowanus Canal. There were apartment houses, brownstones, yards in the back, trucks all over the place, garbage guys taking their garbage away, kids jumping rope, kids making their own skateboard scooters by nailing a two-by-four to a pear box, breaking the back. There were a lot of moms screaming out the window: 'Come home, come on. The macaroni's on. Get up here.' 'Tony, where are you? Bring the dog in.'"

— Pat Cooper, *It Happened In Brooklyn*

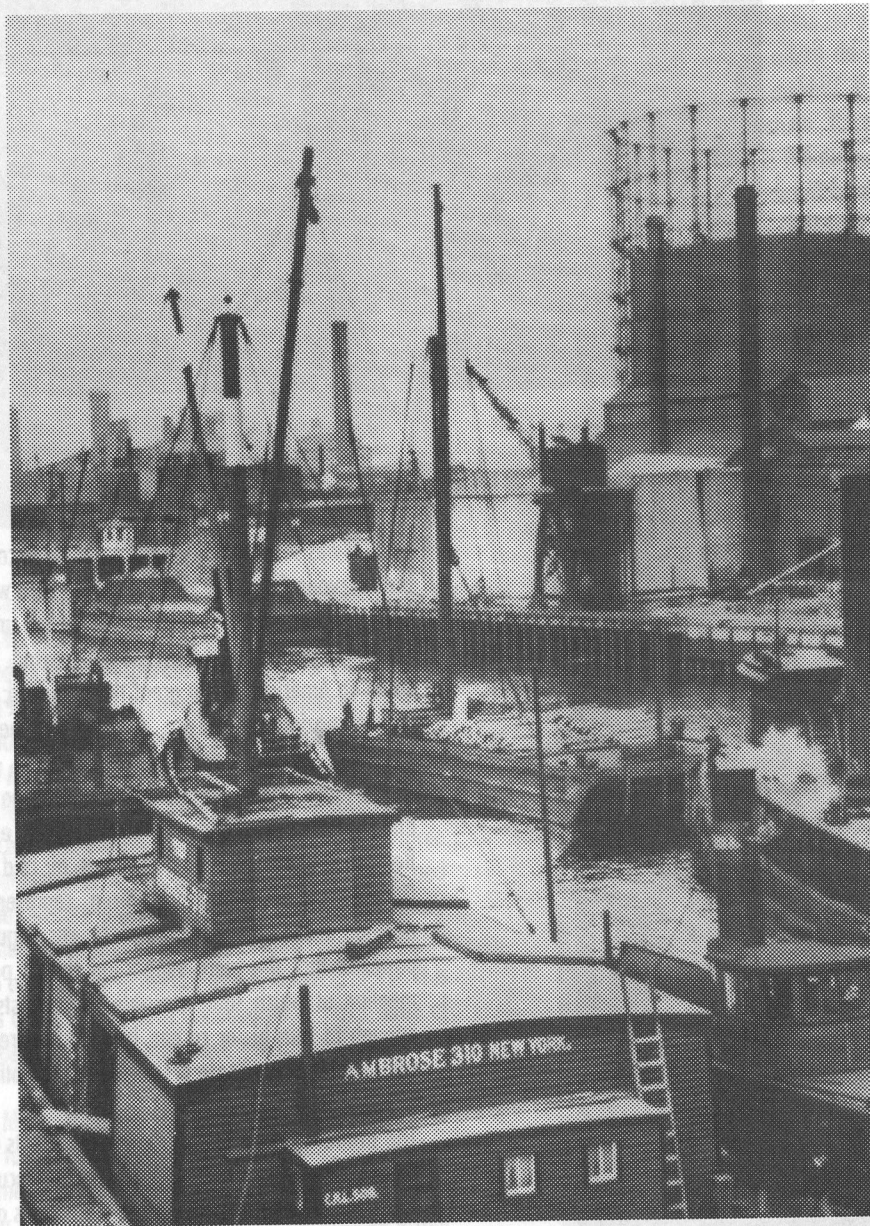
A View From The Bridge takes place in Red Hook, Brooklyn, a neighborhood near the New York Harbor, south of the Brooklyn Bridge. In the 1950s, Red Hook was a poor, working-class Italian neighborhood. It was generally dirty, smelly and gritty, by industrial gas tanks, shipbuilding yards and wharves. The best part of the wharves and the docks was their source of employment to many of the men in Red Hook, as longshoremen, or dockworkers. Most of the longshoremen left their houses and walked five minutes to the pier. They often waited for days or weeks for ships to come in, and when it did, they worked 24, 36, or 48 hours at a clip.

The living conditions in Red Hook varied from nice to very crowded. Many people lived in brownstones, or four or five family buildings, some floors of which did not have a bathroom. The community was familial and warm as well as tough.

Loyalty and respect for the family and extended family was considered very important. The men could be very macho, occasionally violent, but violence

was acceptable and sometimes even encouraged, to display one's masculinity and show who was boss.

The relative poverty of Red Hook and lack of education was probably connected in some way to the toughness of the neighborhood. The neighborhood had a reputation for being an area where you were trained early for the hard knocks of making it in Brooklyn, "whether by the straight road or another". The Mafia, or the Mob, had an unspoken but very real presence in Red Hook. It was said that Al Capone hung out here and acquired the scar that gave him his name "Scarface."



The enormity of the sea and heavy machinery right along the shores of Red Hook, Brooklyn

The combination of poverty, lack of education, and a stronghold on tradition resulted in a community that was quite resistant to change and afraid of things foreign, new or different: a sentiment that prevailed over much of the country in the early 1950s due to the anti-Communist wave in the post-war United States. In general, anything that could possibly be considered undermining democratic values was looked upon unfavorably, and at the same time, everything slightly different was though to be weird or wrong.

Eddie Carbone and his family are seated right in the middle of these culturally, topically based opinions. The Red Hook community in *A View From the Bridge* constitutes a significant reflection and measure of the force of judgment during this time. People worked hard and struggled to find and maintain their positions in this small Brooklyn society. Neither their socio-

economic positions nor their cultural identities were fixed, so their opinions sufficed as a stronghold—grounded in tradition and focused on heritage.

Happy? Continued:

out, a great many others were equally responsible), the playwright wrote in *The New York Times*, "...is everybody really happy now? Do Americans really believe they have solved the problems of living for all time? If not, where are the plays that reflect the soul-racking, deeply unseating questions that are being inwardly asked on the street, in the living room, on the subway? Either playwrights are deaf to them, which I cannot believe, or they are somehow shy of bringing them onto the stage." One thing Mr. Miller has never been, in this regard, is shy.

At a time when it may have been professionally irresponsible, Mr. Miller was quite interested in responsibility. As American entertainment turned inward, Mr. Miller asked three questions: 1) What is our responsibility to each other? 2) Why are we wasting precious time writing about the problems of our private lives; and 3) What is a play worth if it not relevant to the survival of the human race?

The way to salvation lies in Eddie Carbone's words: "If you said it you knew it, if you didn't say it you didn't know it." Say it. With the admission of our complicity — of our connection to the rest of humanity — comes the chance to act responsibly. Until we are true to ourselves we cannot be true to others.

"The truth is not as bad as blood, Eddie!" Beatrice urges her husband just before he proves her right. We are all connected, the plays of Arthur Miller tell us. And the connection, like so much else, begins at home.



ACTIVITIES:

- Before you see the performance, consider the following question: What do you know of Greek theatre? In particular, what did it look like and how was the space used by the actors? Go to the library and find a book on Greek theatre to use as a reference. How would a 20th century play be accommodated in that kind of playing area? Design a set that has elements of a Greek theatre but with the necessary theatrical elements and props of a modern play. (i.e. a kitchen table or a sink)
- While watching the performance, pay attention to Eddie's journey. Can you track his emotional journey from beginning to middle to end? How has he changed by the end? How has he been affected? By whom? Does it remind you of another character or historical figure's journey from a play or legend? How is it similar? How is it different?
- After seeing the performance think about what it means to be part of a community. What is your school community comprised of? How is it ordered? Where do you fit in? How does judgment function as a law enforcer? Think about what would be the perfect community. Write an essay about an ideal community and send it to: Margaret Salvante, Education Director Roundabout Theatre Company 1530 Broadway New York, NY 10036.

WEBSITE:

Be sure to check out Roundabout's website for more information on this production, the rest of our season and all of Roundabout's activities.

<http://www.roundabouttheatre.org>

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WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

What To Look For

The upper lobby of the Roundabout Theatre has a number of resources for your convenience. There is a refreshment counter where you can buy soda or a snack, but please remember that you will not be permitted to take these items into the theatre with you. Student discounts are available to those who show a student ID card. Roundabout's lobby is also an art gallery, so you might want to have a look at the paintings we have on display. Also, take the time to review the display about the show.

Ticket Policy

As a student participant in *From Page To Stage* or *Theatre Access*, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

Audience Etiquette

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.

Thank You For Your Cooperation And Enjoy The Show!

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Hale Matthews Foundation • New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
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