A View from the Bridge

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Before Reading

A Close Reading of the Opening Scene

At the beginning of the play, a character called Alfieri sets the scene and introduces two of the main characters. First entrances on stage are always important in a play. This activity gives you a chance to look closely at this opening scene.

In groups, read this short extract carefully and then answer the following questions, annotating the extracts as you go:

Extract 1

ALFIERI: This one’s name was Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman working the docks from Brooklyn Bridge to the breakwater where the open sea begins. [ALFIERI walks into darkness.]

EDDIE: [moving up steps into doorway]: Well, I’ll see ya, fellas. [CATHERINE enters from kitchen, crosses down to window, looks out.]

LOUIS: You workin’ tomorrow?

EDDIE: Yeah, there’s another day yet on that ship. See ya, Louis. [EDDIE goes into the house, as light rises in the apartment. CATHERINE is waving to LOUIS from the window and turns to him.]

CATHERINE: Hi, Eddie! [EDDIE is pleased and therefore shy about it; he hangs up his cap and jacket.]

1. What are your first impressions of the character of Eddie? What can you say about him from this opening scene where the audience are introduced to him for the very first time?

2. What are your first impressions of the character of Catherine? Why?

3. What do you think is the relationship between Catherine and Eddie?

The opening scene continues…

Now read Extract 2 to find out how the opening scene continues. Note down your comments about it before moving on to the Extract 3.
Before Reading

Extract 2

EDDIE: Where you goin’ all dressed up?
CATHERINE [running her hands over her skirt]: I just got it. You like it?
EDDIE: Yeah, it’s nice. And what happened to your hair?
CATHERINE: You like it? I fixed it different. [Calling to kitchen] He’s here, B.!
EDDIE: Beautiful. Turn around, lemme see in the back. [She turns for him.]

1. What do you now think is the relationship between Catherine and Eddie? Have your first impressions changed? Why?

Extract 3

EDDIE: Oh, if your mother was alive to see you now! She wouldn’t believe it.
CATHERINE: You like it, huh?
EDDIE: You look like one of them girls that went to college. Where you goin’?
CATHERINE: [taking his arm]: Wait’ll B. comes in, I’ll tell you something.
Here, sit down. [She is walking him to the armchair. Calling offstage.] Hurry up, will you, B.?
EDDIE: [sitting]: What’s goin’ on?
CATHERINE: I’ll get you a beer, all right?
EDDIE: Well, tell me what happened. Come over here, talk to me.
CATHERINE: I want to wait till B. comes in. [She sits on her heels beside him.]

1. Have your first impressions of the relationship between Catherine and Eddie changed by reading this third piece of the opening scene?

2. What do you now think is the relationship between Catherine and Eddie?

3. What, if anything, has changed your first impressions of the characters and their relationship to each other?

4. Who do you think B. might be?
Extract 4

CATHERINE: I want to wait till B. comes in. [She sits on her heels beside him.] Guess how much we paid for the skirt.
EDDIE: I think it’s too short, ain’t it?
CATHERINE [standing]: No! not when I stand up.
EDDIE: Yeah, but you gotta sit down sometimes.
CATHERINE: Eddie, it’s the style now. [She walks to show him.] I mean, if you see me walkin’ down the street -
EDDIE: Listen, you been givin’ me the willies the way you walk down the street, I mean it.
CATHERINE: Why?
EDDIE: Catherine, I don’t want to be a pest, but I’m tellin’ you you’re walkin’ wavy.
CATHERINE: I’m walkin’ wavy?
EDDIE: Now don’t aggravate me, Katie, you are walkin’ wavy! I don’t like the looks they’re givin’ you in the candy store. And with them new high heels on the sidewalk - clack, clack, clack. The heads are turnin’ like windmills.
CATHERINE: But those guys look at all the girls, you know that.
EDDIE: You ain’t ‘all the girls’.
CATHERINE [almost in tears because he disapproves]: What do you want me to do? You want me to -
EDDIE: Now don’t get mad, kid.
CATHERINE: Well, I don’t know what you want from me.
EDDIE: Katie, I promised your mother on her deathbed. I’m responsible for you. You’re a baby, you don’t understand these things. I mean like when you stand here by the window, wavin’ outside.
CATHERINE: I was wavin’ to Louis!
EDDIE: Listen, I could tell you things about Louis which you wouldn’t wave to him no more.
CATHERINE [trying to joke him out of his warning]: Eddie, I wish there was one guy you couldn’t tell me things about!
EDDIE: Catherine, do me a favour, will you? You’re getting to be a big girl now, you gotta keep yourself more, you can’t be so friendly, kid.

1. Note down on the text any areas of tension or strong feelings. What do you think are the causes?

2. Based on the close study you have done here can you make any predictions about the relationships between the three characters?

3. Can you make any predictions about themes and issues that might be raised in the play you are about to read?
Before Reading

Role Plays

1. **Eddie and Catherine confide in friends.**
   In pairs work out a conversation in which either Eddie is talking to a friend about Catherine or Catherine is talking to a friend about Eddie.
   The friend should ask searching questions, to find out about Eddie’s or Catherine’s feelings and what he/she intends to do to try to resolve the conflict.

2. **Eddie and Catherine talk honestly.**
   Role-play a conversation between Eddie and Catherine the next day, after the opening scene you have just read when both try to be honest with each other about what they are feeling.

Read these poems to each other a few times. Try using more than one voice and reading them in different ways.

**Do a Dance for Daddy**

Do a dance for Daddy, make your Daddy smile  
Be his little angel  
Remember you’re on trial  
Mummy’s competition, Mummy brings you down  
When you’re up there shining  
She always wears a frown

Do a dance for Daddy. Bend and dip and whirl  
You’ve got all that talent  
‘Cause you’re Daddy’s girl  
Daddy is your hero, witty and superb  
With a sign upon his door  
That reads ‘DO NOT DISTURB’

Look your best for Daddy  
Pass your test for Daddy  
Stand up tall for Daddy  
Do it all for Daddy

Some day when you’re older you will find romance  
Someone just like Daddy  
Will whistle and you’ll dance  
You’ll recall that music when you’re on the shelf  
You danced for all the Daddies  
But you never found yourself

Paint your eyes for Daddy  
Win a prize for Daddy  
Swim to France for Daddy  
Do your dance for Daddy

Fran Landesman

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Before Reading

Dance to your Daddy

Dance to your daddy,
My little laddy.
Dance to your daddy,
My little man.
Thou shalt have a fish,
Thou shalt have a fin,
Thou shalt have a haddock
When the boat comes in.

Thou shalt have a codling,
Boiled in a pan,
Dance to your daddy
My little man.
When thou art a man,
And fit to take to wife,
Thou shalt wed a maid
And love her all your life.
She shall be your lassie-
Thou shalt be her man.
Dance to your daddy
My little man.

Anonymous

Talk about the poems. Annotate them with underlinings, circles, question marks and comments as you discuss your ideas. Use the suggestions below.

• Who is speaking in each poem? Think about how each line is being said, e.g. sarcastically, tearfully, lovingly, playfully.

• Who is being asked to dance in each poem? What picture do you get of them - their age, personality, relationships with others in the family, gender?

• What kind of future is s/he being prepared to expect by the voice in the poem?

• What can you say about the way different members of the family view one another?

daddy/child child/daddy
mummy/child child/mummy
daddy/mummy mummy/daddy
Before Reading

You should have got an idea about the type of family being presented in each poem. Compare them. What is the same and what is different about these families? What is the writer’s attitude to the family s/he is describing. Give reasons for your answers.

Writing

Write a poem in response to one of the poems, either from the point of view of the child or from the point of view of ‘Mummy’.

Now read and talk about this poem.

Girls Can We Educate We Dads?

Listn the male chauvinist in mi dad -
a girl walkin night street mus be bad.
He dohn sey, the world’s a free place
for a girl to keep her unmolested space.
Instead he sey - a girl is a girl.

He sey a girl walkin swingin hips about
call boys to look and shout.
He dohn sey, if a girl have style
she wahn to sey, look
I okay from top to foot.
Instead he sey - a girl is a girl.

Listn the male chauvinist in mi dad -
a girl too laughy-laughy look too glad-glad
jus like a girl too looky-looky roun
will get a pretty satan at her side.
He dohn sey - a girl full of go
dohn wahn stifle talent comin on show.
Instead he sey - a girl is a girl.

James Berry

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Before Reading

1. Who is the speaker in the poem? What can you say about him/her, giving evidence from the poem?

2. Look carefully at the two viewpoints expressed in the poem. Write them down.

3. Compare the two views.
   Why do you think they disagree with each other?

Writing
Write two short imaginative pieces about the views of the two people in the poem. Let them say what they really think about each other. You could start like this:

‘The trouble with my Dad is that he doesn’t understand…’

and

‘The trouble with my daughter is that she doesn’t understand…’
Before Reading

3. The Reality of the American Dream

The Statue of Liberty has stood in New York harbour since 1886. It used to be seen as the symbol of America’s welcome to the millions who crossed the Atlantic in search of a better life. A poem, ‘The New Colossus’, inscribed on the base of the statue, tries to sum up that welcome and the American Dream. Read this poem and talk about your responses to the questions that have been added to it.

The New Colossus

What do you need to know about the old one?

So why mention it?
Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame
With conquering limbs astride from land to land,
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
‘Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!’ cries she
With silent lips. ‘Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!’

What is America saying here?
Who is the talking to?
What kind of people is she talking about?
What promise is being offered here?

Migration to the USA in the 19th and 20th centuries has been the largest movement of people in human history. Italians have been one of the most important groups in this migration. Between 1820 and 1920 more than 4 million Italians crossed the Atlantic to America. Most of them came from the south of Italy and Sicily, where the land was arid and unproductive, and the exploited peasants lived in conditions of near-starvation. Their main reason for migrating was that America offered opportunities, through work, for them to gain prosperity which they would never achieve in their native land. This dream was not always fulfilled.

Italians - like other migrant groups - lived in the cheapest and worst housing in the cities, and did low-paid work. For instance, they laboured on building the railways, in the clothing trade, mending roads, and on the docks. They were doing jobs which America needed doing if it was to increase its wealth and power. They were often cheated and exploited. Many Americans were suspicious of Italians, and thought they were all violent and dangerous.

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