

The Opening Stage Directions

The street and house front of a tenement building. The front is skeletal entirely. The main acting area is the living room-dining room of EDDIE's apartment. It is a worker's flat, clean, sparse, homely. There is a rocker down front; a round dining table at centre, with chairs; and a portable phonograph.

At back are a bedroom door and an opening to the kitchen; none of these interiors are seen.

At the right, forestage, a desk. This is MR ALFIERI's law office.

There is a telephone booth. This is not used until the last scenes, so it may be covered or left in view.

A stairway leads up to the apartment, and then farther up to the next storey which is not seen.

Ramps, representing the street, run upstage and off to right and left.

As the curtain rises, LOUIS and MIKE, longshoremen, are pitching coins against the building at left.

A distant foghorn blows.

Enter ALFIERI, a lawyer in his fifties turning gray; he is portly, good-humoured, and thoughtful. The two pitchers nod to him as he passes. He crosses the stage to his desk, removes his hat, runs his fingers through his hair and, grinning, speaks to the audience.

Extract from *A View from a Bridge* © 1957, Arthur Miller

Glossary:

- * tenement – run-down apartment building, usually rented to tenants.
- * phonograph - instrument for playing recorded sound (record player).
- * longshoremen – dock workers who load and unload ships.
- * pitching coins – throw, toss or fling coins
- * foghorn – loud, low, warning signal made by ships in fog

1. Why do we, the audience, see the front and 'skeletal' outlines of buildings and not much of the interiors? Think beyond the practicalities of staging and consider what Miller might want to suggest to an audience about the outward appearance of characters and their inner thoughts and feelings.
2. Look at the items that are in Eddie's apartment; what do they suggest to you?
3. Why is Mr Alfieri's law office at the front of the stage, effectively in front of the apartment? Why does it come between the apartment and the audience?
4. Why do you think Miller has chosen to represent the law office with only a desk?
5. What purpose might the stairs to the next storey have when the audience can not see it?
6. What do you think Miller is suggesting by opening the play with two longshoremen pitching coins on-stage? Think about what it implies about how busy they are.
7. As well as showing the audience that the play is set near the sea why else do you think Miller has used a foghorn sound? Consider the type of noise it makes: is it cheerful; eerie; frightening? Think, as well, about why ships use foghorns; what hint might it give us about the mood of the play?
8. What sort of impression do you think an audience gets of Alfieri when he first appears on stage?