In ‘A View from the Bridge’ by playwright, Arthur Miller, we see the main character, Eddie Carbone, engaged in a series of inner and outer conflicts. This essay will explain the nature of both conflicts and discuss which is the most important in terms of character development. Eddie is a longshoreman on the docks of New York. He lives with his wife, Beatrice, and niece, Catherine has been left in Eddie’s care. When Beatrice’s Italian immigrant cousins, Rodolfo and Marco, arrive Eddie enters into conflict with Rodolfo over Catherine. Eddie’s inner conflict centres on his own sexual desire for Catherine and his jealousy towards Rodolfo, as Catherine falls in love with him. He does not know how to let go of Catherine which leads him to outer conflicts with his wife, Catherine, Rodolfo and Rodolfo’s brother, Marco. Through inner and outer conflicts Miller reveals aspects of Eddie’s character, namely his fatal flaw – valuing self-interest over loyalty to the honour codes of his community – which leads to his death.

* Eddie is conflicted over his feelings towards Catherine in the exposition

Start of the play he is appears over-protective (characterisation) and unable to let her live her life – consider symbolism of high heels.

* Conflict between himself and Rodolpho as his relationship with Catherine develops

Eddie is unable to accept that Catherine is growing-up and thereby growing away from him. Eddie doesn’t want her to attract other men, because he is subconsciously jealous: ‘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. ‘Eddie’s inner conflict is demonstrated by his reaction to Catherine’s walk. He cannot voice his own fear and jealousy that Catherine may attract or may be looking for another man. He is threatened by this and wants her to stop. She gives him the ‘willies’, but it is not clear whether this is his fear of her leaving or his own fear that this suppressed feelings for her will come to the surface. Through this inner conflict we see that Eddie is not honest with himself about his genuine feelings. Instead of letting Catherine grow-up and become a woman, he tries to prevent this and have her remain a little girl.

We learn that Eddie is controlling as well as having untoward feelings about his niece. Outer conflict is important to the character development of Eddie. The relationship between Eddie and Rodolfo has become more aggressive on Eddie’s side. In the flat, Eddie takes the opportunity to show Rodolfo some boxing moves, but is actually venting some resentment on him: ‘Eddie: Sure, he’s terrific! Look at him go! (Rodolfo lands a blow.) ‘At’s it! Now, watch out, here I come, Danish! (He feints with his left hand and lands with his right. It mildly staggers Rodolfo. Marco rises.)Catherine: (rushing to Rodolfo) Eddie! Eddie has hit Rodolfo to try and warn him off Catherine as well as letting out some of the anger that he has built-up towards him. This outer conflict with Rodolfo illustrates more about Eddie: he has quite cunningly arranged a way of hitting Rodolfo without confronting him. It shows a malicious and sneaky side to his personality. It’s quite low to try to revenge yourself in such a mean way, taking advantage of Rodolfo’s nice nature. The fact that he does this in public, almost an attempt to humiliate Rodolfo in front of Catherine shows a certain cruelty about Eddie. Outer conflict, in my opinion, is more important is showing the other aspects of Eddie’s character.

Inner conflict resurfaces again when Eddie has to decide if he is prepared to betray the values of the Italian-American community and inform immigration services about Marco and Rodolfo. Eddie and the lawyer, Alfieri, have been discussing the situation. Alfieri becomes the voice of Eddie’s inner conflict as he wrestles with social ostracism and his jealousy: ‘Alfieri: …You won’t have a friend in the world, Eddie! Even those who understand will turn against you, even the ones who feel the same will despise you! (Eddie moves off.)”What Alfieri says is the inner conflict of Eddie. He is torn between the rules of the community and his own fear of losing everything, and the desire not to lose Catherine. His jealousy and desire fight with his common sense. We see that Eddie is a person who is divided between himself, but, since he does phone immigration, his feelings are stronger than his belief in the rules. Eddie appears to the audience as a character who cannot accept matters easily; he is too individual; he cannot put aside who he is for the sake of the community. He is prepared to betray everyone for the sake of his love. This is important character development, nonetheless, the inner-conflict does not show as many interesting features of Eddie’s personality as outer conflict.

When Eddie fights Marco to reclaim his name and dignity after Marco accuses him and spits in his face, we see outer conflict. Marco has sought out Eddie to punish him and Eddie is prepared to fight him, but as they fight Eddie pulls a knife: ‘Louis: Eddie, for Christ’s sake! (Eddie raises the knife and Louis halts and steps back.)Eddie: You lied about me, Marco. Now say it. Come on now, say it!’ Eddie has betrayed the values of the community and then does it again by pulling a knife. We see that Louis is shocked, but Eddie is even prepared to threaten Louis. At this point, Louis is appealing to Eddie yet Eddie is prepared to use a knife possibly on Louis. This demonstrates not only Eddie’s violent streak, it also shows the wildness of his emotions. He is prepared to continue to lie; he claims that Marco is the liar. Eddie is portrayed as a character who will try to protect his public reputation, even though it is in tatters, because he cannot face-up to what he has done. A man who is prepared to fight unfairly despite being the person who is guilty of a betrayal and a man who is not prepared to face the truth about himself. The outer conflict is more important to character development as we see Eddie’s true character and moral values. We see how much he is prepared to lie to protect himself.

This essay has examined which is more important to character development: the inner or outer conflict that Eddie is engaged in. Although inner conflict helps with to understand the feelings Eddie has, it is outer conflict that reveals more about his personality and character. We see a fuller picture of a person by how they act and who they really are, as private conflict can often be so confused and unclear. Therefore, outer conflict is more important in character development. Arthur Miller has created a character that is torn and divided against himself and those around him. By highlighting these conflicts Miller gives a more rounded view of Eddie.