Examine the ideas of Manliness, Hostility and Aggression in ‘A View From the Bridge’. How are these ideas connected?

Suggested Structure for Your Essay

The following points are areas you need to cover. You may need more paragraphs than there are numbered points below.

1. Introduction: the importance of manliness, hostility and aggression in ‘A View From the Bridge’
   Eddie, the play’s protagonist (main character) has a very particular view of what it means to be a man. When other characters do not conform to his ideas of manliness it leads to conflict as is the case with Rodolfo. Conflict also results when a character, namely Marco, does demonstrate conventionally ‘masculine’ characteristics in such a way as to make Eddie feel threatened.

2. The qualities which Eddie considers to be ‘manly’
   What are the characteristics which Eddie feels a man should have? Explain how Eddie’s views and behaviour lead to conflict on a small scale, for example when Eddie criticises Catherine’s clothes or the fact that she’s ‘walkin’ wavy’ or shows open hostility towards Rodolpho and, finally, Marco.

3. Ways in which Rodolpho not conform to this image of masculinity
   Eddie says of Rodolpho that ‘the guy ain’t right’ and ‘the guy is no good’. Explain why and give other examples of things Eddie and the other longshoremen say about or to Rodolpho to show their distrust of him. Discuss occasions where this leads to moments of dramatic tension, for example, Eddie’s kiss at the beginning of Act Two (p64).

4. Ways in which Marco is conventionally masculine
   Explore some of the ways in which Marco conforms to Eddie’s idea of what it means to be a ‘real man’. What do other characters feel about him? Discuss occasions where his manliness leads to conflict e.g. the trial of strength at the end of Act One or Eddie’s death both of which are climactic moments.

5. The link between manliness, hostility and aggression
   You need to consider how these ideas are linked in the play. Remember Eddie is not very well educated and finds it difficult to understand or express his feelings so often responds to threatening situations with verbal or physical aggression. What do you think are Arthur Miller’s views about masculinity? What qualities can we find to admire in Eddie, Marco and Rodolpho?
Other Points to Consider

The Role of the Female Characters
In response to Catherine’s criticism of Eddie towards the end of the play Beatrice says, ‘Whatever happened we all done it, and don’t you ever forget it, Catherine.’ (p81). Is Beatrice right to think that the female characters are also responsible for the tragedy or are they the victims of male aggression and hostility? Look for evidence to support your views.

The Role of Alfieri
Alfieri has a role as a character but also acts as narrator (a modern day Greek chorus) commenting on the action and foretelling the final tragedy.

Language
Eddie, Catherine and Beatrice: short, simple sentences, colloquial, uneducated
Alfieri: thoughtful, educated, sometimes showing a kind of black humour, distanced
Rodolpho: lively, witty, speaking in his second language, entertaining, able to gain interest easily
Marco: initially reserved, serious, intense, finally passionate and bitter

‘A View From the Bridge’ as Drama
Do not forget that ‘View’ was written to be performed. This means that you will have to think about how it will look and sound on the stage. You will need to think about:
• stage directions (what the characters are doing as well as what they are saying)
• Setting (scenery, props etc)
• Effects on the audience
• Different interpretations (how could different actors/directors stage particular moments)

Historical and Cultural Context
The play is set in Red Hook, a slum area, in Brooklyn in the 1950s. Alfieri views the drama from the Brooklyn Bridge. Think back to the work you did on illegal immigrants and the reality of the American dream. How is this significant in the play? Look at the work you did on the Sicilian code of conduct. How does the characters’ background affect their views and behaviour and the play’s themes? What about the Carbones’ social class and how Eddie earns his living?

The play is a tragedy (traces the downfall of an individual). Miller was heavily influenced by this tradition of playwriting from Greek tragedy to the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen. His plays also make important social and political comments reflecting Miller’s belief in Communism.

Assessment Criteria
In order to get a good grade for this essay you need to respond to the play as drama rather than as a published text. As well as discussing the dramatic effects of character and action and exploring the effects of dramatic devices and structures you need to show understanding of language and appreciate social and historical influences on the text.