On the Waterfront: Scene Questions

Scene 1: On the Waterfront

Leonard Bernstein’s ominous soundtrack forewarns the audience something sinister is about to take place.

1. What is conveyed by the establishing shot (consider the visual composition, of the large ship and the small office of Local 374)?

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2. Consider the men walking out of the Local. How would you describe their costume, their walk and attitude? How does sound and visuals work together to convey meaning in this sequence of shots?

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3. What evidence is there to show that Terry Malloy is uneasy with the current situation?

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4. What evidence is there to show that Terry Malloy lacks power and status within the group?

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5. As Terry walks out of the frame, the shot dissolves into a high angle shot of a lone figure walking among the darkened setting of high-rise tenement buildings. As Terry stands behind an iron fence, shouting for Joey Doyle, we see that he is holding a pigeon (whose wings are flapping). Joey replies ‘I gotta watch myself these days.’ What does the mise en scene and his comment suggest about this community and the neighbourhood?

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Scene 2. Joey’s ‘fall’.

Following Terry’s brief conversation with Joey, the camera takes us outside Johnny Friendly’s Bar, where three men stand waiting in their hats and coats. The music echoes the suspense in the narrative. We hear a man’s scream and a body falls from the roof to the street below.

1. How is Terry’s lack of power re-emphasised in this scene?

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2. Mrs. Collins speaks to the officer. What does she say that proves this community has lived in fear of the mob for years? Mrs. Collins also provides an explanation as to why Joey was reluctant to leave his home, and a motive for his murder. What does she say?

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3. Consider how the men respond to the cops. How might this attitude have contributed to corruption and crime in the neighbourhood?

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4. Edie poses the question: ‘Who’d want to kill Joey? This establishes her determination to find Joey’s killer and it is this quest that will drive the narrative of the film. How does she prove her loyalty to her bother?

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5. What does Father Barry offer Edie? How does Edie challenge Father Barry?

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Key Quote: *Keep quiet, you’ll live longer.* This aligns silence with survival.
Scene 3: On the Inside.

We are brought into the back room of Johnny Friendly's Bar where noise and smoke fills the screen. The bartender asks Johnny permission to extend someone credit and Big Mac hands over 'the cut on the shape-up.'

1. Johnny moans ‘there’s nobody tough anymore.’ What does this tell us about Johnny and how could this be seen as ironic?

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2. What evidence is there that Johnny has a softness and fondness for Terry?

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3. How does Johnny Friendly show that he values Terry and offers a parental role?

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4. Charlie shares a story about Johnny Friendly. What does he tell us? (Is Johnny seen as a legend by some of the men?)

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5. What do we learn about Johnny’s upbringing and what emotions may this evoke in the viewer?

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6. How do Johnny’s men describe Joey Doyle?

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7. What evidence suggests Johnny has a volatile temper?

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8. Johnny gives Terry money, which he reluctantly accepts. What does this tell us about Terry?

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Scene 4: The Shape Up

The arrival of the waterfront crime commission investigators is met with resistance. The fact that Detective Glover recognises Terry from a 'fight a couple of years ago,' hints to the promise Terry had in the boxing ring.

1. What does Terry Malloy tell the investigators? Describe the mise en scene and acting, suggesting how this affects the reading of this exchange.

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2. How are camera shots and soundtrack used to convey authority, power and struggle in this scene? Consider the medium close up on Big Mac's face as his eyes roam the crowd and what happens when he throws the tabs when the men begin to turn against him. How does Terry demonstrate a degree of respect in this scene?

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Key Quotes:  

Terry:       I don't know nothing, I ain't seen nothing and I'm not saying nothing.

Father Barry:  This is my parish I don't know how much I can do, but I'll never find out unless I come down here and take a good look for myself.

Scene 5. The Union Explained.

In this scene we discover that ‘the waterfront is tougher..’ like it ain't part of America’ and that the men are fearful of standing up for themselves. ‘Johnny Johnny and his cowboys’ have taken over the very union that is meant to protect these men. Father Barry offers these men the basement of the church as a safe place to meet.

Key Quotes:  Father Barry: Is this all you do, just take it like this?

In the loft of the ship, Terry sits on a pile of bags reading a magazine and enjoying the ‘cushy’ job promised.

1. What does Charley ask Terry to do? Why does Terry refuse Charley’s request, and how does Charley respond to this?

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2. How does Father Barry view the men’s struggle? What does he compare this to?

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3. What is the greatest barrier Father Barry has to fight? How do the men respond to Father Barry?

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Scene 7: The Mob Attacks

As the meeting comes to an end, Johnny’s henchmen attack in a clear attempt at intimidation.

1. How would you describe the pace of the music in this scene and how does it fit into the action?

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2. An intercut scene is when the director may want to cut back and forth between two or more scenes. These scenes are occurring at the same time. This gives viewers the sense that the scene is moving rapidly back and forth between locations. Describe the intercut scene in chapter 7.

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3. Father Barry saves Dugan from the thugs. Why does Dugan agree to ‘stand up?’

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4. How does father Barry’s role change at this point in the movie?

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Key Quote: Father Barry: You stand up and I'll stand up with you.
Scene 8: In the Park

1. What does the ‘juice head’ tell Edie and what does this information reveal about Joey Doyle?

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2. Terry is again referred to as a ‘bum.’ He dismisses the man’s accusations but what does his bravado really suggest?

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3. How does this scene show the huge differences between Edie and Terry?

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**Key Quotes:**

Edie: Which side are you with?

Terry: Me? I’m with me, Terry.

Scene 9: Father and Daughter

1. What does Pop Doyle want for his daughter? What values are upheld or promoted in this scene?

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**Key Quotes:**

Pop Doyle: Edie for years you, mom and me put quarters in the cookie jar o keep you up there with the sisters and keep you from things like I've just seen outside the window.

Scene 10: On the Rooftop

Edie ventures up to the rooftop where she meets Terry and a couple of the Golden Warriors.

*Like the Pigeons, Terry has been trained to curtail his natural instincts and adhere to certain rules. The image of him inside the coop reinforces his affinity for these simple birds.*

1. Why is Terry looking after Joey's pigeons?

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2. What evidence is there that Terry and Edie come from very different worlds? Consider the use of mesh

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**Key Quote:**

Terry: You know this city is full of hawks? They hang around on top of the big hotels. They spot a pigeon in the park, right down on them.
Scene 11: Philosophies of life

1. How do Terry and Edie’s philosophical views differ? Which philosophy is presented as more admirable or desirable? Try and provide evidence to support your answer.

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2. What signs of paranoia does Terry show in this scene? What do you think causes this paranoia?

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3. What does Edie ask of Terry in this scene? How does Terry respond to this?

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Key Quotes:  
Terry: Down here it's every man for himself.

Scene 12: Discoveries

1. Discuss the choice of location and music. What is the function of this scene in the narrative? What does Edie quickly realise in this scene?

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2. The waterfront commission investigators appear and subpoena Terry. What is his response?

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Key Quotes:  
Edie: It was Johnny Friendly who had Joey killed, wasn’t it?

Edie: Pop said Johnny Friendly used to own you. Well I think he still owns you. No wonder everybody call you a bum.
Scene 13: Wise Up!

1. What is the evidence to show that Charley is once again playing the fatherly role with Terry?
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2. What warning does Johnny Friendly give Terry?
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3. What is the evidence of corruption in this scene?
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Key Quotes: Friendly: We got to do something to muzzle this Dugan or he’ll raise the biggest stink this town’s ever seen. We got the best muscle on the waterfront. The time to use it is now.

Scene 14: The Crucifixion.

A high angle shot reveals Terry down in the hold unloading boxes highlighting his powerlessness to prevent Johnny’s plans to kill Dugan.

1. What evidence is there that the men are cynical towards religion?
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2. How is Dugan killed? What does Terry try and do prior to the incident?
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Scene 15: The Sermon

1. Why is this scene called the ‘Sermon’? Discuss the way in which Father Barry and the workers are portrayed.
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2. What evidence is there that Terry is going through a transformation?
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3. Edie gives Terry Joey’s jacket. What responsibility comes with this jacket?
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Scene 16: Confession

1. Why does Terry look for Father Barry?

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2. What does Father Barry encourage Terry to do?

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Key Quote:  
Terry: If I spill, my life ain't owth a nickel  
Father Barry: And how much is your soul worth if you don't?

Scene 17: Deaf and Dumb

1. What is the effect of Kazan's use of loud diegetic and non-diegetic sound to drown out Terry's confession to Edie?

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2. We see an extreme close up of Edie covering her face with the white gloves. What could this symbolise?

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Scene 18: The Truth

Detective Glover makes his way up to Terry's roof.

1. What does Terry reveal about his last fight? What does this show us about his talent and where his life could have gone?

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2. What ultimatum does Johnny give Charley?

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Key Quote:  
Terry: When those guys want to win a bet, there's nothing they won't stop at.
Scene 19: The Car Ride

1. The brother’s discuss Terry’s upcoming choice. What choice does Terry have to make and what lucrative opportunity is Terry offered in order to do the right thing? What is the effect of locating this scene inside a car?

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2. How does Kazan show us that Terry is fighting a moral dilemma?

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3. What evidence is there to show that Charley is desperate for his brother to do the ‘right’ thing? What conflicting values are presented during this scene?

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4. Why does Charley let Terry leave the car and why does he give him the pistol?

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5. How does Charley’s decision influence the narrative of the story? What values are promoted by his decision?

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Key Quote:  
Terry: *i could have had class! I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody. Instead of a bum, which is what I am. Let’s face it. It was you Charley.*
Scene 20: Calling Terry

1. Discuss how Kazan uses mise en scene to convey values and emotions in this scene. Consider costume, lighting and visual composition.

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2. How does Kazan use Bernstein’s music to prepare us for another crucifixion?

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3. What is the significance of Mrs. Collins in this scene?

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Scene 21: Sacrifice

Emerging from the shelter, Terry spies the body of his brother hanging from a longshoreman’s hook, his trademark camel hair coat ruined by gunshot holes and blood.

1. How do we see the reversal of Edie and Terry in this scene?

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Scene 22: Power through Truth

1. For one of the first times in the film, we see Terry from a low angle. What might this suggest about his character and relationship with Johnny?

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2. According to Father Barry what is ‘bravery’?

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3. What is symbolised by the shattering of the picture of Johnny and Mr. Upstairs?

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Key Quote: Father Barry: ‘Don’t fight him like a hoodlum down here in the jungle. Because that’s just what he wants. He’ll hit you in the head and plead self defence. You’ll fight him in the courtroom tomorrow with the truth.’
Scene 23: The Courtroom

1. What atmosphere is conveyed through what we see and hear in the courtroom?

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2. How does Mr. Mac make a mockery of the legal system?

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3. How does Mr. Upstairs respond to Johnny and what does this tell us about Terry’s testimony? What is the effect of this cutaway shot?

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4. How has Terry’s testimony helped the longshoremen? (Listen to the lawyer’s words.)

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Scene 24: The Aftermath

1. Why has Tommy killed a large number of pigeons? How does this reinforce the way the community sees Terry? Also consider what happens when Terry turns up for work.

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2. How does Terry feel about what he has done? How is this conveyed through acting and mise en scene?

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Scene 25: The Final Confrontation

1. Describe how this scene is filmed. What messages are conveyed by the visual composition and sound?
   
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2. What does Terry express and what is the significance of doing this publicly?
   
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Key Quotes: Johnny Friendly: ‘You ratted on us, Terry.”

Terry: “From where you stand, maybe. But I'm standing here now.”

Scene 26: The Fight

1. Why does the fight scene reveal about the personalities of Terry and Johnny?
   
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2. How do the Longshoremen respond to the fight? What does this response suggest about power?
   
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Scene 27: The walk

1. Describe the camera work during Terry's long walk. What does this convey about the theme of individual heroism and collective responsibility?
   
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2. Discuss the meaning and significance of the soundtrack during the closing shots of this film.
   
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3. To what extent does this closing scene provide an ambiguous and dissatisfying resolution of the narrative?
   
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