

And do we blame superstition for what came to pass?

Or could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class?

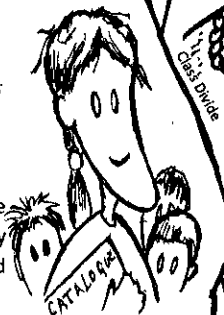
# Blood Brothers

She is 25 years old at the start of the play and has already had seven children. This suggests that she has a naturally maternal character, embracing new life and being a caring person. Russell might also be hinting at religious rulings against contraception. Often she makes rash decisions on impulse rather than thinking carefully over the consequences of her actions. For example, she buys lots of items from a catalogue on credit despite knowing she probably won't be able to pay for them later. She has a strong, generous character knowing almost instinctively what's right and wrong, although her circumstances make it hard for her to be a straightforwardly 'good' person. She refuses Mrs Lyons' attempts to bribe her showing that she values people above money; yet she does agree under extreme pressure to give Mrs Lyons one of her children. This is suggested to be largely unselfish because she is shown only to have concern for the child, foreseeing a more comfortable life for him. She is naturally a kind and loving mother and finds it hard to discipline her children and keep them under control. When Sammy burns the school down instead of scolding him she casually jokes that it was the school's fault for letting 'the silly gets play with magnesium'. She is uneducated and does not value intellectual or academic pursuits. This is probably why she is superstitious, something which causes her to believe the twins' curse and be terrified into following Mrs Lyons' desires. It also means she lacks concern for the education of her children, taking little interest when either Mickey or Sammy are suspended from school. She is lively and has a zest for life. This can be clearly seen in her love of dancing, but also in her general attitude, which could almost be said to be happy-go-lucky. She follows her instincts, believing them to be her best guide through life.

She has a fatalistic attitude: 'what will be will be'. She does not really concern herself with causes or explanations of the events in her life, instead accepting them as they happen. She rejoices in her relocation by the council for example, but does not wonder how this occurred - to her, it is merely the work of fate's lucky hand.

She is poor and trapped by poverty. This makes it very difficult for her to care for her children and is ultimately the reason that she gives Edward away to Mrs Lyons. Russell suggests that she is old before her time (remember that she is only in her mid-twenties at the start of the play) and has had to sacrifice any youthful enjoyment for the life she has.

## Mrs Johnstone



## Mrs Lyons

She is presented by Russell as a lonely housewife, with a cold character who finds it difficult to be affectionate towards others. This may be her natural personality, but circumstances certainly haven't helped: she and her husband are unable to have children naturally and her husband spends long periods at work away from home.

She is wealthy, but dependent upon her successful businessman husband's income. She doesn't work or do the housework. She hires Mrs Johnstone to do the cleaning for her, while she shops for expensive things. Russell creates this character as an inconsiderate, pampered but dependent individual. She is a self-centred character who uses others for her own gain. Once Mrs Johnstone has handed over Edward, she no longer needs her and cruelly discards her, manipulating her through preying on her uneducated and superstitious mind. She is an over-protective mother, who is always anxious about Edward, and tries to keep him in the house or garden away from Mickey because she doesn't want him 'mixing with boys like that'.

She is shown to be overcome by anxieties and suspicions in later scenes, which Russell suggests are the results of excessive loneliness and a loveless life. She becomes unreasonable and is possibly mad when she attacks Mrs Johnstone.

## Edward



A friendly, generous character. He searches out Mickey to play with and perhaps naively offers him sweets in an attempt to impress him. He joins in with Mickey and Linda's games and unselfishly tries to get Mickey to express his love for Linda.

He is raised in a middle-class home and is educated at a private school. He feels restricted and this is one of the reasons he likes the company of Mickey. He revels in Mickey's liveliness, bad language and risky games. He is shown to be an impulsive character and one who doesn't think too deeply about the consequences of his actions. This can be seen in the way he rashly mocks the policeman in the first act and has an affair with Linda in the second.

He seems to lack compassion and does not sympathise with Mickey's plight. Instead, he tells Mickey to use his dole money to live like a 'Bohemian'. Later, he arranges for Mickey to have a job, but does so condescendingly by keeping it secret.

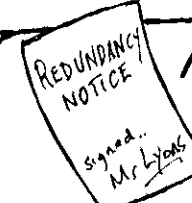
## Linda

Naturally kind and compassionate character. She comes to Mickey's aid both when he is suspended from school and when he is mocked by the other children. She is quite feisty and humorous, joining Edward and Mickey in their games and often leading the way. For example, she plays a trick on a policeman so that the three of them can run away. Linda is strong-willed and very supportive of Mickey. She tries to protect him and keeps pushing him to give up his drugs.

Linda is from a poor family like Mickey. Her lack of education and money allows her no real chance of happiness once Mickey becomes a depressed drug addict. As a last resort, she asks Edward for help before having an affair with him. Her betrayal of Mickey suggests that she is in some ways untrustworthy; but this is also her only chance to escape from the circumstances that have trapped her.

## Mr Lyons

A wealthy businessman who spends long periods of time away from his family. He becomes the managing director of the factory where Mickey worked before Mickey was made redundant. He is a distant figure to his wife and son, preferring not to get involved in their affairs. Instead he provides money and homes in wealthy areas as well as expensive schooling for Edward. He seems indifferent to the people whose lives he can directly affect - his workforce. He sends Mickey a heartless redundancy letter.



## Mickey



A friendly, excitable boy in Act One. He likes to play adventure games with others and sneak off to pull pranks. He looks up to his older brother Sammy and often feels like a cast-off in comparison to him. He feels the need to impress Sammy and finds it hard to say no to him. Later in the play this will influence him into helping in Sammy's crime. He is very shy about his emotions and takes years to ask Linda out even on a date. He finds it hard to tell Linda that he loves her. He tries to prove himself to her through working hard but becomes even more withdrawn after becoming unemployed.

He is energetic, bright and witty, but not very well educated. He does not show interest in his schooling and gets suspended for ridiculing his teacher. He is more interested in getting a job.

He likes Edward's generosity and, in turn, enjoys being able to show him new things. Edward gives Mickey a chance to shine and be a leader and escape the oppression he feels from his brother, school and general poverty.

## Sammy

He is an aggressive and threatening kind of character who the audience would recognise. From the start of the play he is shown to enjoy making fun of others, especially Mickey. He is presented as anti-social and criminal, threatening a bus conductor with a knife and killing a filling station worker. He has no outlet for his hostile tendencies, he has no job or money.

## Blarb



Willy Russell was born in 1947 into a working-class family near to Liverpool. He left school at 15 without academic qualifications and became a hairdresser. By the age of 20 he felt the need to return to education and, after leaving university, he became a teacher at a comprehensive school in his home city. During this time Russell wrote songs for performers and for radio shows. One of his early plays was about the Liverpool pop group the Beatles. He has a love of popular music and this can be seen in many of his plays, but especially in Blood Brothers.

Blood Brothers was completed in 1981, two years after the Conservative party leader Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. She felt that British manufacturing industry had become uncompetitive and saw the cause as weak employers and overly strong trades unions who were, she felt, only too willing to call their members out on strike. She reduced the powers of the workers' unions and privatised ('sold off') many publicly owned companies. She closed many uncompetitive coal mines, too.

## Liverpool

A short-term result was that Britain suffered an economic downturn and unemployment soared. This particularly affected industrialised working-class areas in the north of the country and Willy Russell would have seen this first hand in his home city. Liverpool's famous docks, a traditional source of local employment, were allowed to run down and thousands of households fell into poverty; crime levels increased; housing was allowed to deteriorate and illegal drug use became more common. Some of this context is directly reflected in the play, for example, Russell shows the terrible effects of unemployment on Mickey's self-esteem.

## Background Context

### Political

One of Thatcher's central political beliefs was that success came to those who chose to work hard. In Blood Brothers, Russell contradicts this view. He shows a divided society by having Mickey and Edward attend very different schools and live in different houses.

That money and influential connections are necessary to become successful is written into the play. Mickey's failure, despite his good character and hard work, is the basis of the tragedy in the drama

### Cultural

Marilyn Monroe was a very famous Hollywood actress. Her image was well known even to people who did not watch her films. She was presented by the media as a kind of 'perfect' fantasy woman and she was shown to live a glamorous and carefree lifestyle. The reality was often very different. She needed anti-depressants and eventually died from an overdose of pills.

In the 1950s society went through massive changes. As a result of young people gradually having more money, popular culture (music, TV and film) flourished, becoming accessible to a much wider public. Even the poorest in society, people represented in the play by the fictional Johnstone family, would have had the chance to go to the cinema or to a club for dancing. Think about the various ways characters in Blood Brothers are influenced by music, film and, especially, fantasy. Mr. Johnstone's attitude toward his wife is based on her likeness to Marilyn Monroe. Mrs Johnstone's love of 'dancing' is a love of escape from her everyday life. The boys' love of playful but 'violent' games, playing at cowboys and gangsters is influenced by films. Russell uses references to Monroe throughout the play. At each point he refers to a different aspect of her life and public image. Mrs Johnstone enjoys the glamour of Monroe's public image. Later in the play Mickey becomes hooked on anti-depressant 'nerve pills' and this is compared to Monroe's own depression.



## The Narrator

Russell creates a 'character' of the narrator, who acts a little like the Greek 'Chorus' from ancient tragedy whose role is to explain some of the key action on stage. The narrator also involves the audience by asking them directly to judge what they see. He helps to make sure that the audience stay a little 'detached' from the events of the play. He also helps them remember that this is a 'story'.

He reveals that the brothers die at the very start of the play and from then on constantly reminds the audience of the twins' fate. He presents the themes of fate, destiny and superstition throughout the play, but at the end he asks the audience to consider if it was social forces rather than 'fate' that caused the tragedy.

## Policeman, Milkman, Judge, Teachers

These minor characters are created for various dramatic purposes. They either lack sympathy or are unfair and two-faced when dealing with others. They represent social institutions, which Russell seems to suggest are prejudiced.

### Policeman

The policeman is friendly at the wealthy Lyons' house, but in contrast is harsh when dealing with the Johnstones.

### Milkman

The milkman won't listen to Mrs Johnstone's valid excuses initially, but once she has some money at her new home he is pleasant and flirts with her.

### Judge

The judge gives Sammy a lighter sentence than would have normally have been handed out, but this is only because he is attracted to Mrs Johnstone's appearance.

### Teachers

Edward's schoolteacher is petty and takes the side of Edward's bullying classmates. Mickey is certainly awkward and disrespectful to his teacher, but he and Linda are suspended for minor things. The teacher does not bother to answer Mickey's questions, even though they seem quite justified.

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## Social Class & Inequality

The difference between the Johnstone and Lyons families draws attention to the impact that a person's social class can have on their opportunities in life. From the moment that Mrs Johnstone goes to work for Mrs Lyons at the beginning of the play, the audience's attention is drawn to how their lives are worlds apart. This contrast is emphasised throughout the play.

In the song *My Child*, Mrs Lyons draws attention to all of the things she will be able to give to the twin that she takes, that Mrs Johnstone will be unable to provide.

*'He'd have all his own toys and a garden to play in.'* - These things are taken for granted by Mrs Lyons, but are out of the reach of the Johnstone family. This emphasises the differences between them. It also suggests that what Mrs Lyons is offering the child is materialistic so the difference between the mothers is based on possessions, rather than love and care.

EDWARD - *Fantastic. When I get home I'll look it up in the dictionary'*  
MICKEY - *In the what?*

The way that the boys speak is very different, which reflects their backgrounds. While Mickey uses swearwords which Edward has not heard before, Edward is shown to be better educated. Russell indicates to the audience that social class can have a significant impact on the levels of education of children, giving them different starting points in life.

EDWARD - *So you're not working. Why is it so important?*

Due to Edward's privileged background, he is unable to understand the difficulties that Mickey has being unemployed. Mickey has nothing to fall back on and Edward will never be in that position because of the support he gets from his family. This demonstrates the lack of understanding the higher classes can have of the desperation of unemployment for the working classes.

## Violence

Violence has a presence in the working class characters' lives from a young age. When we first meet Mickey as a seven year old, he has a toy gun and he plays games involving imaginary guns with his friends and neighbours. The violence escalates as the play progresses, culminating in the tragic death of Mickey and Edward. Sammy, Mickey's older brother, is a key character linked to this theme and he is connected in some way to most of the violent acts in the play. Violence reflects a lack of control; when characters start to lose power in some way, they become more violent.

*'...the whole thing's just a game'*

The violence is only pretend and after being 'killed', the children can join the game again. However, the games foreshadow the later violence at the end of the play, and remind the audience of how present this is in the characters' lives.

Sammy persuades Mickey to be a lookout when he robs a garage, but the robbery goes wrong and Sammy shoots someone.

Sammy is able to persuade Mickey to get involved with this violent act because he has such little power over his life after losing his job. It is this event which leads to him going to prison and becoming depressed and then growing apart from Linda, which causes her to find comfort with Edward. Sammy involving Mickey in his plan is the catalyst for the tragic ending.

*'Wherever I go you'll be just behind me. I know that now... always and for ever and ever like, like a shadow.'*

Mrs Lyons becomes irrational and paranoid and accuses Mrs Johnstone of following her. She then lunges at Mrs Johnstone with a kitchen knife. This reflects how violence is linked to feelings of powerlessness and instability. Violence is a reaction by characters to their feelings of weakness and lack of control over what happens to them.

## Superstition & fate

Mrs Johnstone's superstition is revealed early on in *Blood Brothers* and is one of the things that gives Mrs Lyons power over her. This is linked to fate and destiny, because Mickey and Edward's death is shown to be inevitable from the opening scene, making the superstition Mrs Lyons tells Mrs Johnstone about the twins come true. The narrator is a key character for this theme, as he reminds the audience of the twins' fate at several different points of the play. However, while superstition and fate are very important themes in *Blood Brothers*, Russell questions whether they really exist or whether social class is more important in determining Mickey and Edward's futures

*'You never put new shoes on the table'*

Superstition is immediately linked to the working class, because Mrs Johnstone is superstitious whereas Mrs Lyons isn't.

*'They ... they say that if either twin learns that he once was a pair, they shall both immediately...'*

This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The audience is already aware that the twins will die because of the opening of the play, so everything that happens is linked to this. Although Mrs Lyons has invented the superstition, her behaviour actually leads to the tragedy of Mickey's death because she is the one to point out to him that Edward and Linda have betrayed him.

*The narrator's song Shoes upon the Table serves as a reminder throughout the play of the boys' fate and the mothers' guilt.*

## Stage Direction

Stage directions are used to indicate what the actors are doing, revealing their behaviour and how they interact with each other: Mickey and Sammy exit. Mrs Johnstone stands watching as they approach the bus stop. She smiles at Mickey's failure to cope with Linda's smile of welcome.

It is clear that Mrs Johnstone is a caring mother, as it makes her happy to watch her teenage sons going to their school bus. She also seems to know Mickey well as she understands his awkward reaction to Linda

## Dramatisation

Willy Russell's *Blood Brothers* was intended to be performed with music, rather than simply read. It is important to consider the characterisation, staging & music when studying the play.

## Characterisation

When the play is performed, the actors playing the characters of Mickey, Edward, Linda and Sammy all play these characters as children, teenagers and adults. Willy Russell states in his notes at the beginning of the play that the same actors should play these characters throughout. This means that the actors have to play their characters in different ways according to the age of the character at that moment in the play.

### MICKEY

When Mickey is aged seven, he is friendly, open and easily upset; when Mickey is a teenager, he is awkward, embarrassed and hides his feelings; after coming out of prison, Mickey is depressed and unable to communicate his feelings fully. The actor playing Mickey has to use his voice, facial expressions and body language to convey these changes to the audience so that they can follow the storyline correctly.

### EDWARD

As a child, Edward is very friendly and eager to make friends; as a teenager, he is warm and fun-loving (although he doesn't understand Mickey's problems when he is in his late teens); as an adult, he appears in the play less but he is a successful, professional man.

### MRS JOHNSTONE

Unlike the twins, Mrs Johnstone stays very similar throughout. She is down-to-earth and very affectionate towards her children. At the start of the play, Mrs Johnstone is struggling a lot to support her family and would show this in the way she acts but in the second act she is more relaxed and content.

### MRS LYONS

At the beginning of the play, Mrs Lyons is in control and manipulative, however, she becomes increasingly insecure after taking Edward from Mrs Johnstone. In the second act, Mrs Lyons loses control and becomes irrational and violent towards Mrs Johnstone.

### THE NARRATOR

The Narrator is a difficult character to play in a different way because he does not interact with other characters in a normal way; he speaks to them and about them but they do not show awareness of his presence.

The Narrator is on stage throughout the play, watching the characters and commenting on events. This can be played in different ways: sometimes the Narrator is played as a sinister, threatening character and sometimes he is more objective in the way he is played.

Regardless of the way he is depicted, the Narrator is always mysterious and creates an important link between the audience and what is happening on stage, through speaking directly to those watching and asking them questions.

## Language

The language used in *Blood Brothers* is primarily naturalistic, to give a realistic impression of conversation between the characters. There is however some use of figurative language in the songs drawing the audience's attention to important themes.

One of the key elements of Russell's use of language in *Blood Brothers* is the difference between the way the working class characters speak and the way the middle class characters speak. When Mickey and Edward first speak, this contrast is funny for the audience. However, as the play progresses and the twins grow up, the differences between the way they speak emphasises how separate their lives and experiences are, due to their social classes.

The naturalistic way the characters speak means that their emotions are often revealed through how fluent their lines are. When characters are very upset or angry, they speak using a broken syntax, meaning that their sentences are fragmented, with pauses and incomplete moments.

The stage directions are also important to analyse as they show how the characters may be feeling when they speak; they also suggest tone to the reader.

## Contrasting Accents

There is a clear difference between the way that the working class and middle class characters speak. This is evident immediately when we meet Mrs Johnstone: I said, I said, look, next week I'll pay y'... and Mrs Lyons: It's a pretty house, isn't it? It's a pity it's so big.

Mrs Johnstone appears to be down-to-earth, while the content of her speech reflects the hardship of her life. Mrs Lyons, on the other hand, speaks in a way that demonstrates that she comes from a more privileged background. She seems unaware of the insensitivity of her remarks to her struggling employee.

## Lack of Fluency

When characters feel strong emotions, their speech becomes disjointed and broken up, such as when Mickey confronts Edward about his affair with Linda: D'y' know who told me about... you... an' Linda... your mother...

Russell has written the play to reflect natural speech so when characters are very upset they are unable to think clearly and express themselves fluently. Mickey's panic and irrationality is clear here. He is so upset with Edward that he cannot speak coherently. His inability to form a complete sentence demonstrates his confused mental state.

## Figurative Language

Several of the songs in the play contain metaphors that are linked to the key themes. These symbols often recur throughout, such as in the song *Shoes upon the Table* and the references to Marilyn Monroe, such as Mrs Johnstone's description of Mickey when he's in prison: Just like Marilyn Monroe / His mind's gone dancing.

Marilyn Monroe features as a symbol throughout *Blood Brothers*. Earlier on, she represents freedom and sexiness but towards the end of the play she stands for depression and early death, as her life spiralled out of control, leading to her becoming dependent on prescription medication and dying of an overdose.

The reference to Marilyn Monroe suggests that Mickey has lost control over his life and emotions. It also foreshadows his early death.

## Staging

Willy Russell gives instructions at the start of the play for how the stage should be used in the performance. There is not a requirement for many props or pieces of scenery. Even though the way the characters speak is naturalistic, the staging is not (this is also true of the actors playing characters at different ages and the Narrator's character).

Consider why Russell has included the following staging points in the play's 'Production Note':

- There should be different settings and time spans being indicated by lighting changes and no cumbersome scene changes to allow the play to flow along easily and smoothly. The focus is on the events of the play and the relationships between the characters, rather than appearances. This allows the audience to focus their attention on the play's central themes and ideas and be drawn into the emotion of the play, without being distracted by scene changes.

- Two areas are semi-permanent - the Lyons' and the Johnstone house. These two areas are separate on the stage, emphasising the differences between the two families and the lives they live. However, there is also a reminder that the houses are geographically not very distant - during the period in which the play was set, poor and rich areas of Liverpool could be very close together.

- We see the interior of the Lyons' comfortable home but usually only the exterior front door of the Johnstone house, with the 'interior' scenes taking place outside the door. Again, this would remind the audience of the different lifestyles that Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons, and then Mickey and Edward, have. The comfort of the Lyons' house is a big contrast to the lack of warmth suggested to the audience through only showing them the Johnstone's front door.

- The area between the two houses acts as communal ground for street scenes, park scenes, etc. When the boys are young, they are unaware of the significance of the differences between them, so they can behave as equals away from their homes, where the differences between their backgrounds are not important.

# Blood Brothers

**Form** The play is written in lines of dialogue, with stage directions and songs to be sung by particular characters at different points. The songs in *Blood Brothers* are used for different purposes: they can reveal more information about characters' thoughts and feelings; they can remind the audience of key ideas and themes; they can create mood and atmosphere; and they can further the plot and explain parts of the storyline. When you read the play, it is important to pay close attention to the lyrics of the songs as they can reveal a lot of useful information about characters and events. The stage directions are also significant because they show the reader how the characters behave and interact with each other and Russell uses them to prompt key events in the storyline.

## Structure

The play is structured in two acts. The first act starts in the early 1960s, before the birth of the twins, Mickey and Edward, and moves on seven years to when the boys meet as children. The second act resumes when Mickey and Edward are in their teens, and tracks them through to adulthood. Chunks of time are passed over in order to focus on the pivotal events in the lives of the twins

Aside from the opening of *Blood Brothers*, the play is chronological. At the very beginning, the audience is shown the dead bodies of Mickey and Edward on stage and the Narrator explains that they have died on the same day they have discovered that they are brothers. The rest of Act one reveals how the twins came to be separated and then shows the audience the contrast in their childhoods. Sympathy for Mrs Johnstone is created in this part of the play because of the hardship of her life. Act one ends hopefully, with the optimistic song *Oh Bright New Day* demonstrating how happy she is to get a new start for her family in the countryside.

Act two starts on the same positive note, with the Johnstone family much more content in their new home. However, while Act one becomes increasingly happier, the events of the second act get more and more tragic as Mickey reaches adulthood, culminating in the death of Mickey and Edward.

In both acts, Russell uses songs to fill in gaps where time passes, such as the *Summer Sequence* in Act two (which shows Mickey, Edward and Linda's friendship as they age from 14 to 18). Songs also provide information about what has previously happened, such as Marilyn Monroe sung by Mrs Johnstone in Act one, where she describes her life with her husband before he left her.

- Starting and ending with the death of the twins reminds the audience of the inevitability of their deaths.
- The events of the play become sadder and more difficult as the brothers reach adulthood. This reflects how Mickey's social class affects him negatively more and more as he reaches adulthood and he is unable to escape the inevitability of unemployment and the consequences of this.
- Songs are used throughout the play to give more information about events and periods of time that cannot be covered in the play.

## Music

The songs are an integral part of *Blood Brothers*. They are spread throughout the play. The songs are used for different reasons, including filling in gaps in the storyline, creating mood and atmosphere, revealing information about characters and reminding the audience of key themes and ideas.

The actors sing the songs live, often with a live band as well. This creates more atmosphere for the audience. Russell aimed to include songs that were reminiscent of the type of music sung in working men's clubs, so the music helps to create a mood that is close to the types of places people like the Johnstones and their friends may have visited.

When the actors sing their songs, they remain in character throughout, as the songs are important in revealing more about what these characters are like and their thoughts and feelings. Although the songs are not a natural way for the characters to communicate, they are included seamlessly within the action of the play.

## Thinking

1. How does Russell use the characters of Mickey & Eddie to explore ideas about:-
  - a) Friendship?
  - b) Crime?
  - c) Poverty?
  - d) Nature vs Nurture?
  - e) Superstition?
2. If you had to blame one character (not a theme or idea) for the deaths of Mickey & Edward, who would it be?

# Blood Brothers - Themes

## SOCIAL CLASS

- The Johnstone's way of life compared to the Lyons' way of life:  
*Any line from My Child*
- The set draws attention to class divide:  
*My mummy doesn't allow me to play down here actually*
- How class upbringing affects the two boys over time:  
*While no one was lookin' I grew up... And you didn't because you didn't need to*
- Different attitudes and expectations as a result of class - Narrator + Songs:  
*Could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class?*

## NATURE V NURTURE

- The idea of being a twin:  
*I will always defend me brother, and stand by him*
- The connections between the twins as boys:  
*You say smashing things don't you?*
- The differences in upbringing between the boys:  
*...it sounds dead funny swearin' in that posh voice*
- The differences between the twins as grown men:  
*Why didn't you give me away! ...I could have been him!*

## FRIENDSHIP

- Mickey and Linda as children:  
*She's a girl but she's alright*
- The twins as blood brothers:  
*I will always defend me brother, and stand by him*
- The friendship between the three teenagers:  
*If only the three of them could stay like that forever*
- How friendship changes with the pressures and reality of adulthood:  
*While no one was lookin' I grew up. And you didn't because you didn't need to*

## MOTHERHOOD

- Mrs Johnstone as a mother:  
*I love the bones of every one of them*
- Mrs Lyons as a mother:  
*I took him. But I never made him mine*
- Songs connected to motherhood + the Narrator's comments:  
*And that other child of mine, I haven't seen for years, although Each day I pray he'll be ok*
- The boys' relationships with their mothers:  
*She's fabulous your ma, isn't she? OR 'I've explained, it's a secret. I can't tell you.' 'But...but I'm your Mother'*

## CHILDHOOD

- The games played by the children:  
*The whole thing's just a game*
- The twins as children:  
*D'you want to be me blood brother Eddie?*
- Adolescence - the role of the Narrator in showing time passing:  
*If only the three of them could stay like that forever*
- The contrast between childhood and adulthood:  
*While no one was lookin' I grew up. And you didn't because you didn't need to*

## LOVE

- Adult relationships as role models: Mr and Mrs Johnstone / Mr and Mrs Lyons:  
*Me husband, he walked out on me... The house is your domain*
- Comparing the bond between Linda and Mickey and Linda and Eddie:  
*Mickey I love you! I suppose I always ...love you, in a way*
- Linda and Mickey as a couple:  
*An' what about what I need?*
- Linda and Eddie as a couple:  
*They should have gone their separate ways*

## SUPERSTITION

- Superstition linked to working class ideas:  
*You never put new shoes on the table*
- Mrs Lyons' manipulates Mrs Johnstone's superstition:  
*You must swear on The Bible*
- Mrs Lyons succumbs to superstition herself:  
*(She rushes at the table and sweeps the shoes off)*
- The role of the Narrator in drawing attention to superstitious portents:  
*Someone broke the looking glass*

The main themes in Blood Brothers are connected with differences in social class, and the effects these have on the lives of the main characters. Although superstition and fate are presented as themes, the political message of the play seems to be saying that it is real-world social forces that shape people's lives.

### Social Class

Family and friendship for characters from two different social classes form the heart of the play.

Russell shows how wealth brings privilege, even down to the way the Johnstone's and the Lyons are treated differently by the law. The four main characters can be seen to be social stereotypes, presented dramatically in order to emphasise certain important differences in social class. Russell does this to show the unfairness that it results in.

### Individual & Society

In the play Russell illustrates the influence that society has on individuals, in their education, behaviour and the opportunities they have. When Mickey says at the end of the play 'I could have been him', the audience become aware of just how differently life might have turned out for him if he had been brought up within the Lyons family.

### Nature vs. Nurture

The 'nature versus nurture' debate is about how much a person's life is determined by their inherited genetics (their 'nature') and how much is determined by the environment they grow up in ('nurture'). The boys are identical twins and so the difference in the way their lives turn out must be a result of their different upbringings and social positions. Russell uses the twins' idea to persuade us that attitudes in society influence people's lives more than their individual efforts at wanting to do well.

### Fate, bad luck & destiny

Each of the major characters is presented as being trapped and plagued by various kinds of misfortune and bad luck. Russell seems to be asking us to consider whether there really is such a thing as fate or destiny or whether life pans out because of natural rather than supernatural reasons, because of the way we are educated and live.

So although fate and superstition is a recurring idea, everything in the play leads to question whether these things really exist.

In the play, the friendship between Eddie and Mickey is initially strong despite their different social

### Friendship

backgrounds. Russell is saying that children can make friends easily and form strong relationships even if their parents don't approve. He is suggesting that human nature is blind to social conventions.

But in the adult world, unemployment and poverty hits Mickey. Edward seems to him to be from a different world. Russell seems to suggest that friendship is dependent upon shared experiences. Once the two characters go their separate ways, shaped and moulded by education, wealth and social status, tensions develop between them.

Russell's play is deliberately objecting to a view that was popular in the UK at the time the play was written. Margaret Thatcher's right wing conservative government claimed that everyone who wanted to work hard could be successful. But Russell clearly objects to this view.

### Education

This theme is linked to social class. Russell shows that wealth brings different educational opportunities and these lead to very different lifestyles. Eddie and Mickey are educated differently. One goes on to university and a successful career in politics, the other to a factory job making boxes. Redundancy and lack of opportunity then lead Mickey to crime, drug addiction and depression. Without a better education Russell is saying that Mickey had few options, and so we are asked to see Mickey's mistakes in a sympathetic light.

The effects of education shape the lives of the women in the play too. When Mrs Johnstone loses her husband she falls into poverty from which her lack of education has provided her with no easy means of escape. She can take unskilled work, and also has to rely on the State for rehousing to a better place.

Compare her with Mrs Lyons who also, despite presumably a middle-class education, is still not self-reliant. In this case Russell is suggesting perhaps that the traditional lives the women lead have less freedom, even when they are educated.

So although fate and superstition is a recurring idea, everything in the play leads to question whether these things really exist.

Many works in drama and literature have a theme of 'growing up'. Russell's play is in part just this.

### Growing Up

Life, for the children, is shown to be a carefree game in Act One. But the pressures of growing up in different backgrounds and educational systems are shown to bring problems later on. It is the different experience of growing up that ends the friendship between Edward and Mickey. For example after Mickey loses his job Edward tries to be positive about his situation. But Mickey tells Edward that he cannot understand living on the dole. He says that Edward hasn't had to grow up like him, to face the difficulties of the adult world. He says that they don't have anything in common any more.

### Men & Women

All three major female characters in the play (Mrs. Johnston, Mrs. Lyons and Linda) suffer at the hands of the men in their lives - they are either let down by their husbands or receive no affection from them.

Russell presents a world where the roles of women and men are sharply separate, as a result of the roles given to men and women in their social classes. The female characters tend to be more passive, the male characters are shown as being active and macho.

Russell's play has money and materialism as a theme. Mrs. Johnstone's life in debt, buying things on the 'never-never',

leads to problems. But Mrs Lyons' wealthy existence fails to bring her contentment and happiness either.

### Money

Money controls the relationship of Edward and Mickey too - once Edward returns from university as a wealthy man, Russell suggests that his friendship with the penniless Mickey can no longer be the same, as he cannot appreciate Mickey's reaction to being jobless. And nor can Mickey's pride allow him to accept financial help from Edward.

## TRAGEDY

- The opening and closing tableaux:  
*So did y' hear the story of the Johnstone twins?*
- Superstition:  
*You never put new shoes on the table*
- Staging and theatrical effects:  
*(The music pulsates and builds...)*
- The role of the narrator - symbols and portents  
*You know the devil's got your number... A debt is a debt and must be paid*

## THATCHERISM

- Regional and class differences:  
*Could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class?*
- The rich / poor divide:  
*My mummy doesn't allow me to play down here actually*
- Unemployment:  
*I'd crawl back to that job for half the pay and double the hours*
- Education:  
*You know the most smashing things*

## SPECIFIC CHARACTERS / RELATIONSHIPS

Revise the main characters in pairs so that you can contrast any one character with another -

- Mickey and Eddie:  
Connected, friends, separated by class, education and economic events
- Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons:  
Separated by class, jealous of each other, different styles of Mothering
- Linda (against whom you would compare Mickey and Eddie):  
Loves both twins, friends, forced to become 'old before her time'

## MICKEY

Separated at birth from Edward: *'As like each other as two pins'* - Narrator.  
Looks up to Sammy: *'I wish I was our Sammy'* - Mickey.  
Poor upbringing: *'Living on the never never' & you've not had much of a life with me, have y'?* - Mrs Johnstone.  
A victim of the recession: *'While no one was looking, I grew up'* - Mickey. *'Sign of the times'* - Mr Lyons.  
Feels cheated by life: *'I could have been him'* - Mickey.

## EDWARD

Separated at birth from Mickey: *'As like each other as two pins'* - Narrator.  
Looks up to Mickey: *'You [Mickey] say smashing things' & 'She's fabulous your ma, ain't she?'* - Edward.  
He is upper-middle class: *'Make sure he keeps with his own kind, Mr Lyons'* - Policeman.  
He is naive: *'Why is a job so important?'* - Edward.  
He is loyal: *'everybody has secrets, don't you have secrets?'* - Edward.  
He experiences betrayal: *'A light romance'* - Mrs Johnstone.

## MRS JOHNSTONE

Gives away her babies: *'kids can't live on love alone'* - Mrs Johnstone.  
Her decision haunts her: *'The mother, so cruel, there's a stone in place of her heart' & 'A debt is a debt & must be paid'* - Narrator.  
She loves her children: *'I love the bones of every one of them'* - Mrs Johnstone.  
She is perceptive: *'I'd spend it. I'd buy more junk & trash.'* - Mrs Johnstone.  
She is often poor & has a hard home life: *'Living on the never never'* - Mrs Johnstone.

## MRS LYONS

She is lonely: *'Myself, I believe an adopted child can become one's own'* - Mrs Lyons.  
She is manipulative: *'You said you had too many children already'* - Mrs Lyons.  
She uses Mrs Johnston's superstitious nature to keep the boys apart: *'If either twin learns that he was once a pair, they shall both die immediately'* - Mrs Lyons.  
Even though she gains a child she is paranoid that he is not truly hers: *'Edward is my child. Mine'* - Mrs Lyons.  
Her paranoia makes her unstable: *'You're mad. Mad.'* - Mrs Johnstone.

## NARRATOR

Their role is like a chorus in a Greek tragedy: *'Actually, I've given up the milk round & gone into medicine.'*  
They create dramatic irony in the play: *'So, did y' hear the story of the Johnstone twins?'*  
Reminds the audience & characters of their fate: *'You've got to have an endin' if a start's been made' & 'A debt is a debt & must be paid.'*  
They represent social conscience: *'And do we blame superstition for what came to pass? / Or could it be what we, English, have come to know as class?'*

## OTHER KEY QUOTES

*'I wish I was a bit like...I wish that I could be like'* - Edward to Mickey then Mickey to Edward.  
*'Mixing with boys like that'* - Mrs Lyons to Edward.  
*'They say I'm incapable of controllin' the kids I've already got'* - Mrs Johnstone to Mrs Lyons.  
*'Give one to me'* - Mrs Lyons to Mrs Johnstone.  
*'Gis a sweet'* - Mickey to Edward.  
*'You're a fuck off'* - Edward to his mother.  
*'Serious crime...prank'* - Policeman to Mrs Johnstone then Mrs Lyons.  
*'Does my child belong to you as well, along with everything else?'* - Mickey to Edward.