**OCR GCSE Drama-**

**Play to write about in the Section A of written exam**



**Blood Brothers**

**By Willy Russell**

First performed in 1983

(Musical version)

*Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*Form\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*Teacher\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

**Characters**

**Leading characters**

• Mrs Johnstone

• Mrs Lyons

• Mickey

• Edward

• Linda

**Supporting characters**

• Narrator

• Sammy

• Mr Lyons

**Minor characters**

• Policeman

• Milkman

• Judge

 **Teachers**

**Brief guide to the playwright**

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 radio shows. One of his early plays was about Liverpool pop group The Beatles. He has a love of popular music and this can be seen in many of his plays, especially Blood Brothers.

Willy Russell originally wrote and presented Blood Brothers as a school play in 1982, in conjunction with the Merseyside Young People’s Theatre. He then wrote a score and developed the musical for a production at the Liverpool Playhouse in 1983.

**Key themes of the play**

**Social Class**

The contrast between two different social classes forms the heart of the play. The leading 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.

**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 takes on 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 only acquire unskilled work and has to rely on the State for housing. Compare her with Mrs Lyons who similarly, despite presumably a middle-class education, is 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.

**Nature vs. Nurture**

The ‘nature versus nurture’ debate is exemplified through Mickey and Eddie. They are 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 concept of twins to persuade us that attitudes in society influence peoples’ lives more than their individual efforts at wanting to do well. Russell’s play is deliberately objecting to a view of Margaret Thatcher’s right wing conservative government, who claimed that everyone who wanted to work hard could be successful.

**Fate and destiny**

Each of the leading 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.

**Growing Up**

Life, for the children, is shown to be a carefree game in Act One. However 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 and that they don’t have anything in common any more.

**Men and women**

The three leading female characters in the play (Mrs. Johnstone, 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 within their social classes. The female characters tend to be more passive, the male characters are shown as being active and macho.

**Money**

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 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.

**Blood Brothers Act Breakdown- jot down what happen in each act using bullet points**

**Act 1-**  set in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Act 2-** set in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Style and Genre**

Brief synopsis:

* The story ‘Blood Brothers’ tracks the lives of twins Mickey and Edward. The play is divided into two acts, and has many songs. A narrator speaks to the audience at the beginning and throughout the play, commenting on the action and setting the scene.
* Mrs Johnstone, who has been abandoned by her husband, already has five children and is expecting twins. She works as a cleaner for childless Mrs Lyons who offers, unofficially, to adopt one of the babies. Mrs Johnstone reluctantly agrees as she is concerned that she can’t afford to bring up two more children and, due to Mrs Lyons wealth, knows that the child will be afforded a good chance in life. There is a prophesy that twins parted at birth will die when they discover the truth so both mothers do their best to keep the twins, Mickey and Edward, separated.
* Edward goes to university, while Mickey starts work in a factory. After marrying Linda Mickey loses his job. He turns to crime but gets caught and goes to jail. After his release he becomes dependent on tranquilisers. Linda turns to Edward, now a councillor, for help. Edward gets Mickey a job – and a house.
* Mrs Lyons tells Mickey that Edward is having an affair with Linda and Mickey goes after Edward armed with a gun. He finds him at a meeting but feels unable to shoot him. Mrs Johnstone bursts in and tells them the truth. Waving his gun around in frenzy it goes off. Mickey accidentally kills Edward and in turn is shot by the police.

**Performance characteristics**

Blood Brothers was written to be performed as a piece of musical theatre. It is ultimately a tragic story but is interspersed with comedic elements, mainly focused around the childhood and teenage years of Mickey and Eddie. The play starts by revealing the ending of the story and after this it follows a chronological structure. It spans three decades from the 1950s - 1970s, picking out significant periods in the two brothers’ lives.

**Staging requirements**

The play was written to be performed on a Proscenium Arch stage (traditional theatre stage- with a pit for the orchestra) If performed, as originally intended, in 1950s-70s Liverpool, then it would be conveyed through design elements such as set, costume and music.

Genre(s):

Structure:

Style:

Period and setting:

Why is the setting relevant to Willy Russell?

Target Audience:

Why?

Practitioner influence:

What performance space would you use? Why? Describe/sketch it:

What are the advantages/disadvantages?

THEMES AND ISSUES ARISING FROM THE TEXT:

* THE POVERTY TRAP
* EDUCATION
* SUPERSTITION AND FATE
* DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS
* CLASS STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS
* CRIME
* CHILDHOOD: PLAY AND REALITY

**Social, historical, and cultural research.**

**Social:**

**Historical: time set and period written:**

**Cultural:**

**How have these factors affected the play?**

Homework task:

Research the following sub headings and write your findings underneath.
Explain why they are relevant to the play/how they link to events that happen, what they may stand for or symbolise, Russell’s opinion or general information.

**Margaret Thatcher**

**1950-70s Liverpool**

**Marilyn Monroe.**

**Willy Russell**

**Hot seating:**

**Mrs Lyons:**

**Mrs Johnson:**

**Mrs Johnstone**

**Description of character using information from the script:**

**Vocal skills: Why?**

**Facial expression/Body Language: Why?**

**Relationships with others: Why?**

**Physical skills: Why?**

**Mrs Lyons**

**Description of character using information from the script:**

**Vocal skills: Why?**

**Facial expression/Body Language: Why?**

**Relationships with others: Why?**

**Physical skills: Why?**

**Mickey**

**Description of character using information from the script:**

**Vocal skills: Why?**

**Facial expression/Body Language: Why?**

**Relationships with others: Why?**

**Physical skills: Why?**

**Eddie**

**Description of character using information from the script:**

**Vocal skills: Why?**

**Facial expression/Body Language: Why?**

**Relationships with others: Why?**

**Physical skills: Why?**

**Linda**

**Description of character using information from the script:**

**Vocal skills: Why?**

**Facial expression/Body Language: Why?**

**Relationships with others: Why?**

**Physical skills: Why?**

**The Narrator**

**Description of character using information from the script:**

**Vocal skills: Why?**

**Facial expression/Body Language: Why?**

**Relationships with others: Why?**

**Physical skills: Why?**

**Sammy**

**Description of character using information from the script:**

**Vocal skills: Why?**

**Facial expression/Body Language: Why?**

**Relationships with others: Why?**

**Physical skills: Why?**

**Performance space**

**Use examples of scene as to how certain staging would suit the scenes meaning/the relationships between audience and performer:**

**Scene:**

**Choice of staging:**

**Why?**

**Scene:**

**Choice of staging:**

**Why?**

**Overall play:**

**Choice of staging:**

**Why?**

**Stage Directions**

For each character give specific examples of how stage directions can be used to support the actors communicating their role to an audience:

Mickey:

Stage direction:

How does it help show character?

Edward:

Stage direction:

How does it help show character?

Mrs Lyons:

Stage direction:

How does it help show character?

Mrs Johnstone:

Stage direction:

How does it help show character?

Linda:

Stage direction:

How does it help show character?

**Costume**

**Lighting**

**Set**

**Sound**

**Gun motif**

Explore the use of the gun as a motif throughout the play. Semiotics are used in the play through the use of the gun motif.

**Semiotics**: how meaning is created and communicated through signs and symbols. An audience can interpret the sign of the gun to understand the events of the performance.

Jot down any moments in the play where guns are referred to or seen.

How is the gun used as a motif throughout the play?

Why do you think it is referred to on several occasions?

How do you interpret it as an audience member? What would it make you think each time you saw it?

**Lines from the play:**

Choose a selection of lines that each character says and explain what it shows about that character/how it has an impact on them in the scene.

**Notes:**

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**Useful websites:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/dramabloodbrothers/>

Really good for revision and tests

[www.willyrussell.com/blood1.html](http://www.willyrussell.com/blood1.html)

Lots of information on this website

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvek0bj451Y>

Watch a version of the play

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9mbfRiZ2Bk&list=PL0383FCE1DF004F88>

Old version of a show performed in London (10 parts)