



DRAMA (YEAR 9) Sept – Dec



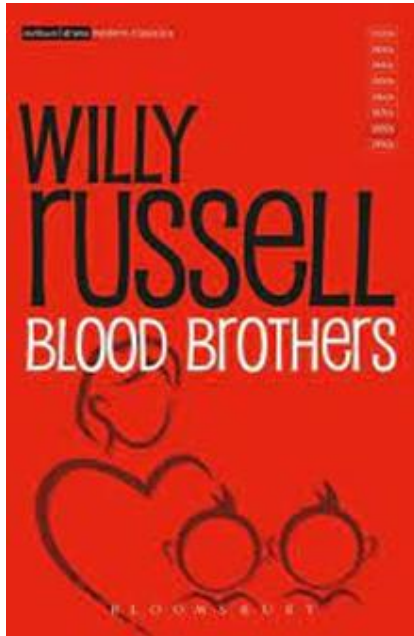
Blood Brothers by Willy Russell is centred around Mickey and Edward, twins who are separated at birth. How will their different upbringings affect their adult lives?

Key Areas of Study	
Vocab	Definition
Themes	Topics that are explored throughout the play.
Social, Political, cultural and Historical influences.	The key influences for the context of the play. Social – <i>what's happening of the time.</i> Political – <i>politics and Government</i> Cultural – <i>Music, religion...</i> Historical – <i>important events at the time.</i>
Context	Who, what, where, when and how?
Playwright	Who wrote the play and their background.
Genre	The category the drama or theatre production. For example Blood Brothers comes under the genre 'Musical'.
Style	How the work is presented on stage. For example Blood Brothers is a naturalistic performance.
Semiotics	The hidden signs and symbols behind a performance. (lighting, sound, set, props and costume).
Symbolism	Analysing the connotations and denotations.

Key Characters	
Character	Key Facts
Mrs Lyons	Wealthy but lives in fear of losing Edward.
Mrs Johnstone	Working class, down to earth living with broken dreams.
Edward Lyons	Impressed by Mickey as a boy and becomes a charming, witty, educated wealthy man.
Mickey Johnstone	A fun loving lad but struggles to express himself as an adult feeling increasingly worthless.
Linda	A friend to both Mickey and Edward. Marries Mickey.
Narrator	A multi role playing actor who introduces scenes and constantly reminds us of the brothers tragic fate.



Blood Brothers Production...



Location: The play is set in and around Liverpool. How is this shown on an open stage with minimum scenery? How is the change from inner city (Act 1) to rural outskirts (Act 2) conveyed on stage? Willy Russell was born and brought up in Liverpool. How important is the setting or could Blood Brothers easily be transported to any other big city? How does the location of the play affect the vocal performances of the characters?

How can lighting, sound and other effects be used to help 'create' different locations e.g. fairground, beach, cinema, in the imaginations of the audience?

The early eighties when the play was first written and performed was a period of high unemployment particularly in areas of the industrialized north. (Russell would have seen this in Liverpool particularly with the decline of the docks.) Crime levels increased and drug use was more common. Which sections of the play clearly illustrate this economic *downturn*?

Religion: Mrs Johnstone is staunchly Roman Catholic. How might an actress show this in her characterization? (Professional productions show the family moving a portrait of the pope when they are relocating their belongings.) How might this strong religious belief affect the way the actress plays the scene where she has to swear on the bible? *"and then if it should happen, that His Holiness flies in from Rome..."* (on C).

Class: Social class is a constant theme throughout the play. How is it shown in the set? The costumes? The characterization of the actors? It is a deliberate convention that the same actor plays both Mickey's and Eddie's teachers. How could he adapt his performance from playing the public school 'master' to Mickey's rather jaded Geography teacher? How does the policeman respond differently to Mrs Johnstone and to Mr and Mrs Lyons when taking the boys home after their 'prank' in the park? How could an actor emphasize these differences? How are the life opportunities afforded to Mickey and Eddie affected by their social class? *"I wish that I could be like, wear clean clothes, talk properly like, do sums and history like my friend."*, *"I'm not sure I'd let him mix with the likes of them in the future."*

Superstition: Superstition, fate, destiny, luck. How do these themes arise in the play? Do you believe in fate or destiny like Mrs Johnstone (*"you never put new shoes on a table"*) or dismiss them as 'superstitious nonsense' like Mrs Lyons? Do you think that the playwright believes in fate? How many *superstitions* can you find mentioned in the play? How many of these have you heard of previously? Is superstition something you associate more with older people? Why do you think this is? *"And do we blame superstition for what came to pass or could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class?"*

Period: The play takes place over more than 30 years although the main characters are played throughout by the same actors. How could you show this in the set, costumes, characterization? Research the introduction of 'hire purchase' (the never never) and 'catalogues' when, for the first time, families could acquire goods without having to pay for them 'up front' (often leading to increased debt), the Margaret Thatcher years, when the powers of the trade unions were significantly reduced, the period when many inner city families were rehoused to the rural suburbs. (All of this helps to place the play within a social, cultural and political context.) *"When y'look in the catalogue an' there's six months to pay, it seems years away, an' y'need a few things so y'sign."*

Marilyn Monroe: Marilyn Monroe was an iconic Hollywood actress of the 50s/60s. Although her image was of an incredibly glamorous lifestyle, the reality was quite different. Russell compares the lives / situations of his characters with that of Monroe at various points throughout the play. Where does he do this and to what effect? *"...and treats his ills with daily pills just like Marilyn Monroe."*

Friendship: Even though they have been brought up very differently, Mickey and Eddie form a very strong bond on their first meeting. What obstacles are placed in their way to force them apart as the plot develops? (*"Mickey says smashing things. We're blood brothers aren't we Mickey?"*) Linda acts as Mickey's protector throughout the play. As children, she defends him against the older kids (*Linda moves in to protect Mickey who is visibly shaken*), as teenagers, against their teacher (*"Take no notice Mickey, I love you."*) and when he becomes hooked on anti-depressant drugs, she tries to help him (*"I get depressed but I don't take those. You don't need those, Mickey."*)

Physical Theatre: "The setting is an open stage, with the different settings and time spans being indicated by lighting changes with the minimum of properties and furniture. The whole play should flow along easily and smoothly, with no cumbersome scene changes." This being the case, how can the actors use physical theatre to create some of the images suggested – particularly in the narration which conveys the passage of time between Mickey, Eddie and Linda being 14 and 18 e.g. the fairground?

Multi-roling: Other than the main characters, actors in Blood Brothers each have to play a number of different roles. Apart from minor costume changes, can you suggest how they can do this through their characterization (e.g. use of face, voice, body language, gesture, movement)?

Function of the Narrator: What purpose do you think the narrator serves (other than to tell the story) and how do you feel he should be portrayed on stage? How important is it that the other characters do not interact with him directly? In the recent stage production, the only character to make direct contact with the narrator was the actress playing Mrs Lyons in Act 2 where the character is beginning to lose her mind. She had fallen and the narrator reached his hand out to help her up, making direct eye contact. Why do you think this was?