



Rainford High School English Department – Year 9 Blood Brothers Knowledge Organiser

Russell	Characters	Key Terminology
<p>Willy Russell was born in 1947 in Liverpool, where the play is set. He came from a working class family.</p> <p>After leaving school at fifteen, he became a women’s hairdresser and a part-time singer/songwriter before returning to education and becoming a teacher. He also started writing plays.</p> <p>Willy Russell originally wrote and presented <i>Blood Brothers</i> as a school play, first performed at a school in Liverpool, in November 1981. He then wrote a score and developed the musical for a production at the Liverpool Playhouse, in 1983. The show transferred to London’s West End on 11 April 1983, winning the Olivier Award for Best New Musical.</p> <p>Willy Russell uses the songs to reveal a character’s thoughts and feeling (like a soliloquy) or to move the plot along. Songs can also highlight key motifs and themes.</p>	<p>Mrs Johnstone: Mickey and Sammy’s mother. A kind and caring woman who makes a difficult decision.</p> <p>Mrs Lyons: A middle-class woman who longs for a child. Edward’s mother.</p> <p>The Narrator: Helps to tell the story. He also plays several minor characters throughout the play.</p> <p>Mickey Johnstone: One of Mrs Johnstone’s children. He’s a friendly child but ends up unemployed and in trouble with the law.</p> <p>Edward Lyons: Mrs Lyon’s son. He’s well-educated and grows up to be a successful local councillor.</p> <p>Linda: Mickey and Edward’s friend.</p> <p>Sammy Johnstone: Mickey’s older brother. He’s always in trouble.</p> <p>Mr Lyons: A wealthy businessman who spends more time at work than with his family.</p>	<p>Pathos – the effects on the audience are feelings of sadness and sympathy.</p> <p>Irony - using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect.</p> <p>Dramatic Irony – something is understood or known by the audience but not by the characters in the play.</p> <p>Monologue - one character speaking, but in front of others.</p> <p>Soliloquy – when a character speaks their thoughts aloud, to themselves.</p> <p>Prologue - a part that comes at the beginning of a play, story, or long poem, often giving information about events that happened before the time when the play, story, or poem begins.</p> <p>Reprise – a song or part of a song that is repeated.</p> <p>Motif – A dominant or recurring image or idea in a text e.g. the gun.</p> <p>Foreshadowing – when the writer alludes to what is to come later.</p> <p>Parallel – two corresponding things that run side by side, e.g. the school scenes.</p> <p>Juxtaposition – Two opposite ideas are near each other in a piece of writing.</p> <p>Cyclical – the structure of the play is cyclical as it starts and ends in the same place.</p> <p>Narrator – echoes the function of the Greek Chorus; asks the audience to detach and judge.</p> <p>Stage Directions – used prolifically by Russell to describe the movement and actions of characters. Entrances and exits are particularly meaningful.</p>
Key Contexts	Key Themes	Narrative
<p>Set in the 1950s – 1980s, and written/ developed in the 1980s, <i>Blood Brothers</i> draws the audience’s attention to the detrimental effect that social inequality can have on people’s lives. There was a large gap between working and middle class in Britain.</p> <p>Liverpool depended heavily on traditional industries, so it was badly hit by the industrial decline in the late twentieth century. <i>Blood Brothers</i> was completed in 1981, two years after Thatcher became Prime Minister. Thatcher’s decision to leave Liverpool to ‘managed decline’ meant 30% of the workforce became unemployed, emphasising the differences between the upper and lower classes.</p> <p>Marilyn Monroe was a famous Hollywood film actress in the 1950s. She was known for being glamorous, however she tragically died young.</p>	<p>Money: Russell explores the differences money can make.</p> <p>Social Class: The Johnstones are working class and the Lyons are middle class.</p> <p>Fate / Superstition: Superstitious ideas are also associated with the uneducated and working-class. Mrs Johnstone may have more reason than most for not wanting to take responsibility for her actions.</p> <p>Nature Vs Nurture: The political message of the play is that it is real-world social forces that shape people’s lives, regardless of biological factors.</p> <p>Friendship: Relationships are explored alongside coming of age and identity.</p>	<p>Act One: The Narrator gives an overview of the story. We see a preview of the play’s final moments. Mrs Johnstone sings about how her husband left her with seven children and she can’t afford to feed them. Mrs Johnstone goes to clean at Mrs Lyons’ house. Mrs Johnstone finds out she is pregnant. Both women later have babies, and Mrs Lyons fires Mrs Johnstone. Seven years later, Mickey and Edward meet near Mickey’s house. They bond immediately. Their mothers find out and forbid them from seeing each other. The Lyons family moves away. The Johnstones find out that they’re moving too.</p> <p>Act Two: When they are fourteen, Mickey and Edward meet and recognise each other. They renew their friendship. Mrs Lyons sees the boys together. Mickey, Edward and Linda meet up and the play moves through scenes in which they age from fourteen to eighteen. Edward leaves for university. Mickey and Linda get married. Edward comes home from university. Sammy remains a bad influence on Mickey and gets Mickey into trouble. Linda gets them a new house and a job for Mickey. There is a confrontation at the Town Hall.</p>



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