

WILLY RUSSELL'S

BLOOD

Brothers



Plot

As a basic starting point, you need to know the play **inside out** ie. you need to know what happens, to whom, and when.

Act 1

In the production you see what happens at the end at the beginning, so you know what's coming. The musical opens with two stretchers laid out on the floor with bodies on. As they are carried off a few bars of the haunting 'Tell Me It's Not True' are sung. The narrator then speaks to the audience 'So, did you hear the story of the Johnstone twins,

as like each other as two new pins, of one womb born, on the self same day, how one was kept and one given away.....'

Mrs Johnstone is the main character. She married young, and by the time her husband leaves her she already has seven children and is pregnant again. She works as a cleaner for a wealthy lady, Mrs Lyons. When Mrs Johnstone learns that she is pregnant with twins she is distraught, knowing that she only earns enough to cope with one. When Mrs Lyons hears this she begs Mrs Johnstone to give one of the twins to her, as she and her husband cannot have children. This is agreed on the condition that Mrs Johnstone will still be able to see the baby when she is at work. However, it soon becomes clear that Mrs Lyons is afraid of being found out and wants the twin that she has chosen all to herself. She fires Mrs Johnstone and tells her that the twins must never learn that they are brothers, because people say that if twins who are separated learn this, they will both die straight away.

Seven years pass and we meet Mickey, the twin Mrs Johnstone has kept. He then meets Edward Lyons or Eddie as Mickey calls him. They become firm friends, and find out that they were born on the same day. Mickey invites Eddie to become his 'blood brother' which Eddie agrees to readily. Although both are told by their mothers to keep away from each other, the friends stick together. Mrs Lyons realises this, and persuades her husband to move away. Soon after, and without knowing that the Lyons are already there, the Johnstones are re-housed in the country.

Act 2

The boys meet again when they 14 and they have both been excluded from school for being rude to their teachers. They both fall in love with the same girl, Linda. Eddie almost tells her that he loves her but doesn't want to hurt Mickey and so helps them get together. By the time Eddie returns from his first term at University, Linda and Mickey are married and expecting a baby. Mickey loses his job so no longer wants to be friends with Eddie, who he thinks hasn't grown up. As Mickey is now unemployed, he acts as a look-out for Sammy during a robbery, but when it goes wrong he ends up in jail. He becomes very depressed and even when he gets out he continues to take anti-depressants.

Linda tires of Mickey taking the tablets and runs to Eddie. When Mrs Lyons tells Mickey about their relationship, he takes Sammy's gun and goes to the council chamber

where Eddie is giving a speech. . Mrs Johnstone finds them and tells them that they are brothers. Mickey can't believe that he could have had the privileged upbringing that Eddie had, saying "I could have been him." He shoots Eddie and is then shot by the police.

Blood Brothers - synopsis

We learn Mrs Johnstone is a poor, single parent with 7 children

She works for Mrs Lyons, a rich lady, who can't have children

Mrs Johnstone finds out she is pregnant with twins

Mrs Lyons forces Mrs Johnstone to give her one of the twins

The twins meet when they are 7 and become best friends and 'blood brothers.'

Mrs Lyons goes crazy that the twins will find out they are related so moves away.

Mrs Johnstone is rehoused, near Mrs Lyons

The twins meet again when they are 14

Edward, the rich twin, goes to university whilst Mickey, the poor twin, gets a job

Mickey marries Linda & loses his job due to recession

Eddie comes home from university and Mickey falls out with him over money.

Mickey gets put in jail for robbery

Mickey gets out of prison but is drug dependant

Linda gets Eddie's help to get Mickey a job and a house.

Mickey goes crazy and goes to kill Eddie.

The twins learn they are twins and both get shot and die.

Act 1:

The play is about the Johnstone twins.

Pin = sharp and dangerous = there is danger assigned to these twins (simile)

One twin is kept and one is given away

The twins die not knowing they are brothers until the moment they both die.

A metaphor 'stone in place of heart' implies Mrs Johnstone doesn't care.

Mrs J – had a husband he used metaphors & similes to win her over

Registry office wedding = poor & because she is pregnant before marriage

She has 7 children. Falls pregnant again and her husband leaves her.

Mrs J is poor; she can't afford the milk.

Mrs J has a job for Mrs Lyons. She is rich (big house, new shoes, has a cleaner) Opposite of Mrs J.

Mrs Lyons can't have children.

Superstition:

Shoes on table

Broken mirror

One lone magpie

We learn Mrs J is having twins. She could afford to live with one more baby only.

Mrs J is being threatened by the welfare – risk of losing all her kids

Mrs L makes Mrs J give her one of the twins. She fakes a pregnancy & she keeps a secret from her husband.

Mrs L is desperate to be a mother. She dreams of it every day.

Mrs J looks up to Mrs L – 'palace' (Houses are opposite – Mrs L 'too big' Mrs J = too small)

Clothing difference

Silver tray for meals

'own' – won't have to share & implies rich and can afford things

Mrs L has made Mrs J swear on the bible – puts a serious / legal element on to this promise

Mrs L speaks posh 'one'

Mrs J has the twins. Mrs L takes one but then goes back on her side of the deal... she tells Mrs J to have a week off (not see the baby every day)

Mrs J lies to her other children and says one twin died.

Mrs L sacks Mrs J because she is worried people will find out the truth. She pays Mrs J a lot of money (shows she is rich)

Mrs J says she will tell but Mrs L makes it seem she has sold a son.

Mrs L puts a superstition on the twins... 'if either twin learns he was one of a pair, they will both immediately die.'

The narrator uses lots of examples of superstition to show that Mrs J is trapped and can't say anything in case something bad happens.

The play moves on 7 years.

Mrs J does not let Mickey play near the 'big houses' (posh end) because she doesn't want him to meet Edward.

Mrs J does not see herself as poor 'rough end & hooligans' which is good as it gives her children hope.

Mickey has a toy gun = violence

Mickey wishes he was someone else from the age of 7 (brother Sammy)

At 7 years old, the twins meet. They become best friends. They become 'blood brothers' because they realise they were born on the same day. This is ironic because the twins are actually 'blood' brothers but they don't know.

We see class difference by:

Mickey – swearing = poor

Eddie – dictionary = education / educated

Mickey will influence Eddie because he is going to look up swear words in the dictionary.

Mickey changes Edward's name to Eddie 'stereotypically' it lowers the class of his name.

Sweets – Eddie has loads.

The twins choosing to become 'blood brothers' is ironic because they are actually blood related brothers but they don't know it.

The poor keep things for themselves when they get them e.g. sweets from Eddie (Mickey won't give to Sammy)

Also – Language of Sammy and desire for a gun.

Mrs J learns that Mickey and Eddie have met. She splits them up and refers to a superstition 'bogey man' it is the poor who believe superstitions more than the rich.

Jennifer Lyons learns that Mickey and Eddie have met. She clearly has been thinking and worrying about this for 7 years.

Mrs L has always told Eddie not to mix with the poor because he is higher class than them (rich). She does nearly make it an individual command about Mickey only but corrects herself.

Another example of irony is when Mrs L says 'you're not the same as him' because Eddie is actually the twin of Mickey so is virtually identical/the same.

Eddie swears at his mum (Mrs L) he learnt the F word from mixing with Mickey. Mrs L hits Eddie hard and tells him off and why he can't mix with 'them' (poor)

Mrs L repeats the word 'my' (first person pronoun) so he doesn't suspect anything.

The children play with an air pistol (gun) they robbed it from Sammy.

They commit a crime by shooting a statue in a park.

They don't respect the police because they say silly answers.

Mrs L is going insane with guilt and keeping the secret.

She brings her husband home to look for Eddie because he is out playing.

Mr Lyons says Mrs Lyons should see a doctor about her nerves.

Mrs L wants to move away as she feels something bad is going to happen.

Mr L puts shoes on the table and Mrs L freaks out... she is now superstitious (when she wasn't at the start)

The children decide to throw stones at windows. They are caught by the police and it is Eddie who is cheeky to the policeman. (rich child in trouble with the law & poor children lied as they told Eddie they do that all the time)

The policeman's language about the crime shows a massive difference in class. He threatens Mrs J with court and makes it very serious. This is because they expect the poor to commit crimes all the time.

When talking to the rich, he is bribed with alcohol. He calls the crime 'a prank' (even though it was Eddie who was cheeky) and he takes his hat off = takes away his power status. He warns Mr L not to let Eddie mix with the poor.

Mr L suggests to Eddie they move as Mrs L is not well (with guilt)

Eddie goes to see Mrs J and she gives him a locket with a picture in it.
Mrs J tells Eddie to keep it a secret.

We see a class issue because Eddie tells Mrs J to buy a new house = he thinks it is that easy to do so. Also, Mrs J has been trying for years to move away.

Mrs L sees a magpie in her new garden. Eddie says don't look as one magpie is for sorrow.

Mickey is lonely without Eddie.

Mrs J is re-housed to the country... where Mrs L has moved to!!!

Act 2

Twins are 14 (moved 7 years on)

Mrs J is in a new council house & it's better.

The children are still causing trouble

Those children who have moved away are becoming the new Mrs J.

Eddie goes to private boys school he doesn't come home or see a girl for a whole half term.

Sammy tries to defraud the bus conductor because he can't afford an adult fare. He pulls a knife. This crime has moved on from a toy gun, to an air gun, to a real knife.

Linda loves Mickey and she always tells him (and others) from the age of 14.

Eddie gets suspended because he won't give his locket to a teacher. Also, the teacher says Eddie is getting too big for his boots (he is too clever)

Mickey gets suspended on the same day as Eddie. Mickey doesn't care about his education so is cheeky to the teacher. Linda also gets suspended for siding with Mickey.

The language the teachers use as insults show the difference in the social class of the twins.

Mrs Lyons isn't happy Eddie gets suspended. She demands the locket and finds a picture inside. Mrs L thinks it is Eddie on the picture with Mrs J and freaks out. Eddie tells her it is Mickey and asks why Mrs L thought it was him. They talk about keeping secrets.

Linda tries to seduce Mickey (they are 14) and he doesn't dare respond (is this because of the legal age of consent?) Linda teases Mickey by saying another lad is good looking. Mickey gets jealous but doesn't do anything with Linda so she leaves.

The song 'That Guy' is ironic because Eddie wishes he was like Mickey and Mickey wishes he was like Eddie and they are actually more alike than they realise because they are twins. This is the second time Mickey wishes he was someone else (he wanted to be Sammy earlier)

Mickey and Eddie meet and become best friends again. Eddie teaches Mickey how to seduce a girl (he's read it in a book)

We learn that Eddie thinks Mrs L (his mum) is off her beam (nutter)

Social class is seen because Eddie lives on the top of the hill = high status

Eddie thinks Mrs J is a fabulous mum and he wishes his mum was like her (he doesn't know it is his real mum)

Themes

Clearly your study of the play must go beyond this basic level. You need to track key themes throughout the play, identifying where they appear and what they reveal about characters. The main themes are outlined below:

Friendship	The friendship between Eddie and Mickey happens instantly, but is tested throughout the play because of their different backgrounds.
Social class	The play highlights the differences between the life experiences of working class and middle class families and the way they are treated by society, such as the policeman acting differently around Mrs Johnstone and Mr Lyons when the children are in trouble.
Violence	Runs throughout the play, from Sammy and the other children playing with guns as children to the robbery and violent deaths at the end.
Childhood	The play explores the issue of childhood and the different ways the twins are brought up, for example Edward learns from Mickey as his upbringing makes him more like an adult than a child. Their childhood innocence in Act 1 is soon destroyed as they grow up in Act 2.
Nature/nurture	When Mickey says "I could have been him" he implies that his life would have turned out differently had he been brought up by Mrs Lyons. Is this true - do we behave in a certain way because of our upbringing (nurture) or is our behaviour down to the personalities that we are born with (nature)?
Superstition	Mrs Johnstone believes in lots of superstitions. Her beliefs are used by Mrs Lyons to trap Mrs Johnstone into silence - she tells her that if the boys discover they are twins they will both die.

Characters

There are a lot of characters in the play, some serve a major role and some a minor one.

Each of them, however, serves a purpose in the play and is there to move the plot along or reveal something about another character.

Major characters are: Mrs Johnstone, Mrs Lyons, Mickey, Edward, Linda, Narrator.

Minor characters are: Mr Lyons, Sammy.

Social class quotations

Housing = Mrs J says to Mrs L:

‘It’s such a lovely house it’s a pleasure to clean it’

Mrs L says:

‘It’s a pretty house isn’t it? It’s a pity it’s so big. I’m finding it rather large at present.’

Wanting to move away = Mrs J sings:

‘Maybe someday we’ll move away and start all over again.’

Think about what stops her doing this... class

Mrs L says:

‘I want to move.’ And they do to the country. Think about why they can move that quickly.

Language = Mickey swears:

‘I’m not playing now because I’m pissed off’ and ‘so you fuck off’

Swearing is seen as lower class.

Eddie swears because of Mickey’s influence:

‘I know what you are, you’re a fuck off’

Crime = policeman makes it serious for Mrs J:

‘...about to commit a serious crime’ and ‘you don’t want to end up in court again do you?’ ‘...I warned you last time.’

Policeman makes it less serious for Mr L:

‘it was more of a prank really’

Education: Mickey gets suspended as he’s not interested:

‘It’s borin’ and ‘you’re both suspended.’

Eddie gets suspended because of a locket but uses Mickey’s influences:

‘You can take a flying fuck at a rolling donut.’

Money / job = Eddie says to Mickey:

‘I have money. Lots of it.’

Mickey has to work:

‘I had to do overtime’

Mixing of classes = Mrs L tells Eddie:

‘I’ve told you never to go where that boy – boys like that live.’ And
‘you see why I don’t want you mixing with boys like that!’

Mrs J tells Mickey

‘Don’t you ever go up there. Do you hear me?’

The policeman tells Mr L:

‘Make sure he keeps with his own kind’

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Future:

Eddie goes to university:

‘I go away to university tomorrow.’

Mickey is unemployed:

‘I would crawl back to that job for half the pay and double the hours.’