

Knowledge Organiser – Blood Brothers

Blood Brothers is a set in Liverpool and follows the fate of a set of twins separated at birth and their eventual death.

Characters		Themes contd.	
Mrs. Johnstone	Mother of Mickey and Edward (the 'Blood Brothers') and is deeply superstitious. She has a good heart and make decisions based on a firm set of morals. After her husband leaves her, she gives one of her twins (Edward) to her employer, Mrs. Lyons, who cannot have children.	Violence	Violence begins as an innocent 'game' in the play with the children playing cops and robbers, cowboys and even Nazi scientists, however, as they get older, violence becomes a real issue in their lives. Sammy becomes violent and threatens people on the bus, he commits murder during an armed robbery, and of course, Mickey shoots Edwards at the climax of the play.
The Narrator	An all-knowing presence who both watches the action and comments upon it to the audience. Despite his many mentions of superstitions and fate, he tells us at the end of the play that the tragedy only happened because of class, not fate.		
Michael Johnstone (Mickey)	One of the twins, remains with Mrs. J, one of the 'lower class' family. Following an innocent childhood, Mickey has a hard time and marries his pregnant girlfriend and loses his job. Following a stint in prison he becomes addicted to anti-depressants. Jealous of Linda and Edward's relationship so runs to Edward's work with a gun, leading to both their deaths.		
Edward Lyons (originally Johnstone)	Mickey's twin brother who is raised by Mr. and Mrs. Lyons, a wealthy Liverpool family. He has a sheltered upbringing and goes off to university and ultimately works as a Councillor He attempts to help Linda and Mickey with his position but ends up admitting to Linda that he loves her, leading to Mickey's jealousy and the play's tragic ending.	Superstition and Fate	This theme appears over and over again throughout the play and is used to manipulate Mrs. J into giving Edward up, Examples include, shoes upon the table, salt being spilled, a looking glass being broken. Mrs. L makes up a superstition about what will happen to the twins, should they ever meet. By saying it, she makes it true.
Mrs. Lyons (Jennifer)	Mrs. J's snobbish employer. She is infertile and persuades Mrs. J to give up one of her twins, faking her own pregnancy. Her guilt turns to suspicion and paranoia and she ends up trying to kill Mrs. J. Her hatred becomes so powerful that she tells Mickey of Edward and Linda's affair, leading to the dramatic, tragic ending.		
Linda	At the start of the play, Linda is tom-boyish and plays with the Johnstone's, however, she quickly develops into a love interest for both boys. After years of poverty and hardship following her marriage to Mickey, she turns to Edward for support and ends up having an affair. She deeply loves both Mickey and Edward.	Context	
Sammy Johnstone	The 'bad apple' of the Johnstone family he is idolized in his younger days by Mickey. He quickly becomes a juvenile delinquent and involved in a life of crime. Eventually he turns to serious crime and persuades Mickey to join him, leading to Mickey's imprisonment.	Willy Russell	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Born in Whiston into a working class family. Written in the 1980s in a time of political and social turmoil in Liverpool. Believes that the failure to succeed in life is not because of a lack of ability, but a lack of opportunity. Surrounded by women in his childhood as his father worked long shifts.
Mr Lyons (Richard)	A wealthy businessman who is too self-important and busy to realize that Edward is not his biological child. As Mrs. Lyons' mental health declines, he becomes more concerned and involved, moving the family to attempt to make her feel better.		
Mr. Johnstone	Starts as a boyfriend to Mrs. Johnstone and they quickly marry following her falling pregnant with their first child (Darren Wayne). He leaves her saying she is "twice the size of Marilyn Monroe" for a younger woman. He abandons his wife and 7 children.	Social context	Unemployment reached 25% in the 1980s. At the time the play is set, factories were closing down. Many workers were required to go onto the dole. Being out of work creates low self-esteem; particularly for traditional men who feel they need to support their family.
The Policemen	Figures of authority, policemen show up at various unlucky times throughout the musical. At first their antics are fairly comical as they try to keep Edward, Mickey, and Linda from mischief, but later on they arrest Sammy and Mickey after a failed robbery attempt. In the final scene, they shoot and kill Mickey—but only after he has murdered Edward.	Political context	Blood Brothers was completed in 1981, two years after the conservative party leader Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. One of Thatcher's central political beliefs was that success came to those who chose to work hard. Many factories and mines closed and Liverpool was nearly selected to have a 'managed decline'
Symbols			
Marilyn Monroe	What begins as a glamorous comparison in the first song, slowly becomes a tragic one throughout the play. Marilyn Monroe's tragic demise mirrors the Johnston's bad luck, getting worse and worse throughout the play. As things go wrong, the opening song's theme comes back with more comparisons to Marilyn Monroe as her life progressed,	Assessment Demands	Component One examination: Section B Section B consists of a: 4 mark question, an 8 mark question and a 12 mark question which MUST be answered. THEN you have a CHOICE of a 20 mark question. YOU MUST ONLY ANSWER ONE OF THE 20 MARK QUESTIONS. There will an extract on which you must base your answers however, you should show you have an understanding of the play as a whole. REMEMBER – YOU SHOULD ONLY ANSWER ABOUT BLOOD BROTHERS IN THIS SECTION AND SHOULD IGNORE ALL OF THE OTHER TEXTS AND QUESTIONS IN SECTION B!!!!
Guns	Guns are repeatedly shown throughout the play, constantly foreshadowing the tragic ending. At first, they are seen as being part of innocent games however, their use becomes deadly during the robbery for which Mickey is put in prison as Sammy shoots someone dead.		
Shoes on the table	When Mrs Lyons puts new shoes on the table, Mrs J reacts violently as she thinks it is bad luck. Mrs L then uses this belief in superstitions to convince Mrs J to keep the boys separate. The narrator then repeats the phrase "there's shoes upon the table" at various moments throughout the play. This symbol of bad luck (along with others) remind the audience of the bad luck to come at the end of the play.	Events	
Edward's Locket	Edward receives a locket from Mrs. J to remember Mickey by. On a narrative level, the locket symbolizes the bond that Edward feels between him, Mickey and Mrs. J. This is a connection, which despite Mrs. L's best efforts, cannot be severed.	Act 1	Act 2
Mickey's antidepressants	Whilst in prison, Mickey becomes hooked on antidepressants, they symbolise how far he has fallen since that bright young boy we saw in Act One.	Mrs J. marries Mr. J and he leaves her for being "twice the size of Marilyn Monroe" she raises 7 children on her own. Mrs J. finds out she is pregnant with twins and panics that she won't be able to raise both of them due to a lack of money. Her employer, who is infertile convinces her to give one of the twins away. Time jump to where the twins (Mickey and Edward) are 7 years old and playing. They meet and after discovering they have the same birthday, they become blood brothers. Mickey introduces Edward to Linda, his friend and the three spend all their time playing together. Mrs J. meets and realises who Edward is. Mrs L realises that Edward knows Mickey and convinces her husband to move away. Mrs J. give Edward a locket to remember Mickey and her by when he moves.	
Themes			
Class and Money	This overarching theme is the most important in the play, as Russell intimates, through the Narrator that class is the only reason the boy's lives ended so tragically. Mrs. J only gives Edward away as she doesn't have enough money to raise both the boys, their lives are so different due to the opportunities afforded to Edward and not Mickey.		
Nature –v – Nurture	Throughout the play, Willy Russell illuminates the contrasts that stem from Mickey and Edward's separate childhoods, and compares them with the similarities that the two share. Mickey, for instance, is rough, rebellious, and jaded from a young age. In contrast, Edward is intelligent but innocent, which is made clear by his generosity towards other children and his tendency to get himself in trouble by accident. The differences between the two boys are rooted in the fact that Mickey grew up in a rough and tumble neighborhood, while Edward came of age in the lap of luxury.		
		Mrs J has been moved to the county by the council. Mickey(M) is 13 L tells M she loves him – he loves her too but struggles to say it. He bumps into E and after realising who each other are, they spend many hours together, with L growing up. Mrs L finds out M is living near her and attempts to kill Mrs J. E goes to uni and convinces M to tell L how he feels. Linda discovers she is pregnant and she and Mickey get married. M loses his job and, feeling desperate, agrees to help Sammy commit a robbery by being the 'lookout' S shoots and kills someone during the robbery and M is caught and is sent to prison where he becomes hooked on antidepressants. Upon his release, we find out E is now working for the council and has helped L get a home and a job for M. L and E begin an affair. Mrs L tells M about the affair and in a fit of rage, he goes to E's work with a gun. Mrs J rushes after him and tells the boys they are twins, as M points the gun at Edward he shoots, and the police shoot him. Both boys die.	

