GCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE: BLOOD BROTHERS

TEACHER GUIDE & STUDENT WORKSHEETS

This booklet is a companion to the online curriculum available at www.yourfavouriteteacher.com.

It includes the content from the ‘Blood Brothers’ course.
Modern Text: Blood Brothers

This pack covers context, plot outline, character and theme analysis, together with some exam style questions and answers.

This booklet contains:

- Suggested teaching order
- Learning objectives for each session
- Questions or activities that teachers could use in their lessons
- A worksheet for each session
- Exam style questions

Suggested Teaching Order and Learning Objectives

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<td>To consolidate understanding of the plots and detail key events.</td>
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<td>To be able to show an understanding of the relationships between the text and the context in which it was written</td>
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<td>Lesson</td>
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| 1      | Plot Overview          | • Can you sum up each act in five bullet points? Only use the most important.  
• Now, rate your bullet points in order of importance (1 = least important, 5 = most important) |
| 2      | Context                | • For each act, list at least two contextual points you could link.  
• To what extent does Russell show a true depiction of liverpudlian society? |
| 3      | Mickey Johnstone       | • Create a list of adjectives to describe Mickey  
• Select three quotes about Mickey and annotate them, analysing use of language, form and structure.  
• To what extent can the audience see a change in Mickey from act one to act two? Use quotes/events from the play to back up what you are saying. Write as an analytical paragraph (PEE/PETAL/PETER etc) |
| 4      | Edward Lyons           | • When does Edward first appear, making himself known to Mickey?  
• How does Russell characterise Edward in the play? Use quotes to back up your interpretations.  
• What contextual information can you link to Edward and his upbringing? |
| 5      | Mrs Johnstone          | • Create a list of adjectives to describe Mrs Johnstone  
• To what extent is Mrs Johnstone’s financial standing her own fault?  
• How does Mrs Johnstone show she cares about her children? Give specific events from the play. |
| 6      | Mrs Lyons              | • How is Mrs Lyon’s portrayed in the play?  
• Create a table of similarities and differences between Mrs Lyons and Mrs Johnstone  
• What theme(s) could you link to Mrs Johnstone?  
• What does the Mrs Johnstone tell us about social inequality during the time period in which the play is set? |
| 7      | Linda                  | • To what extent is Linda to blame for Mickey and Edward’s deaths?  
• How does Linda change from act one to act two? Use quotes to back up your opinion.  
• Select three quotes about Linda and annotate them, analysing use of language, form and structure. |
| 8      | Minor Characters       | • Create a list of minor characters in the play (these should be characters who make a significant impact to Mickey/Edward or others, but don’t appear regularly in the play)  
• How do the minor characters drive the plot forward?  
• Why is Sammy an important minor character?  
• What theme(s) does the narrator represent and why? |
| 9      | Theme: Violence        | • List three characters that link to this theme.  
• List three key events that link to this theme.  
• What contextual information can you link to this theme? |
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<td>10</td>
<td>Which characters represent this theme?</td>
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<td>What are the main events in the play which link to this theme?</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Create a revision resource that summarises what happens in the play. (mind map, flash cards etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td>For each main character, link at least 2 themes that represent them (this is helpful for who to write about if you choose a theme based question in the exam!)</td>
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Lesson 1: Plot Overview

You’ve read the book, you’ve watched the revision video and probably a theatre production! There’s no harm in going over the plot and historical context one more time, as it’s crucial to know the order of events so that you can reference this in your essay.

Plot

Act 1

The opening of the play starts with a prologue spoken by the Narrator. He starts with the end of the story, informing the audience that the two bodies on the stage are those of twin brothers who were separated at birth. He judges the mother as ‘so cruel’ for her role in their deaths.

The play then goes back in time some 20 years. Mrs Johnstone is a struggling, lower-class housewife whose husband has abandoned her. She has 5 children and is pregnant with twins. She works as a cleaner for the wealthy Mrs Lyons who shockingly offers to take one of the twins and bring him up as her own as she herself was childless. Mrs Johnstone agrees but regrets her decision almost immediately. Mrs Lyons quickly fires Mrs Johnstone from her job as she feels threatened by the presence of the biological mother around her adopted child. She even bribes Mrs Johnstone with £50 to leave and narrator comments that they will be punished for their immorality.

The play then jumps forward in time and Mickey is introduced at the age of seven. He idolises his older brother, Sammy, and enjoys playing street games, mostly involving gun-fighting. He is not allowed to play near the nearby wealthy houses. Whilst sulking, he meets Edward and strikes a friendship with him, delighted that they share the same birth-day. They obviously don’t realise they are related and go through an elaborate ritual to become blood brothers. Despite being warned not to play with each other, they ignore their mothers’ instructions. They be-
come a little trio with Linda, a lower-class neighbour. They get into trouble when a police officer catches them throwing rocks at house windows. Whilst the police officer is rude and threatening towards Mrs Johnstone, warning her she might lose custody of her children, he is quite respectful when he is with Mrs Lyons and downplays the situation as a childish prank. Mrs Lyons uses this incident as an excuse to persuade her husband to move away to the countryside so that Edward can get away from Mickey and his family. They end up moving to a large house on the outskirts of Skelmersdale.

Act 2

Seven years later, both twins are 14 and in secondary school. The Johnstone family have been rehoused in Skelmersdale and the family is in a slightly more stable situation. Mickey and Linda fancy each other but Mickey is very shy about expressing himself. Sammy still gets into trouble at school and with the police. Mickey is suspended from school because of rudeness towards a teacher and similarly, Edward is also suspended from his private school for refusing to remove the locket given to him by Mrs Johnstone as a memento, much to Mrs Lyons dismay. Mickey and Edward find each other again and return to their old, close friendship. Mrs Lyons confronts Mrs Johnstone, accusing her of trying to steal Edward’s affection and tries to attack her with a kitchen knife but is stopped. She leaves the house calling Mrs Johnstone a witch.

Mickey, Edward and Linda are now back together again, enjoying teenage larks, scrapes and escapades. Eventually Mickey needs to start work and he finds employment in the local factory making cardboard boxes. Despite being secretly in love with Linda, Edward encourages Mickey to ask Linda out so she can be his girlfriend. Shortly after Edward leaves for university. Soon Linda falls pregnant and Mickey and Linda wed. Bad luck quickly follows and Mickey loses his job at the factory, like many working class people in the 1980’s. When Edward returns briefly from university over the holidays, Mickey cannot join him in their usual fun
due to a lack of money. Mickey then pushes Edward away. When Edward sees Linda he confesses that he has always loved her, not realising that she is already married and pregnant with Mickey’s child.

Mickey is unsuccessful in all his efforts to find work. Eventually, he is persuaded by Sammy to help out with a robbery by being a lookout. Unfortunately the robbery goes badly wrong and Sammy kills a man. This leads to the brothers getting arrested. Mickey is sentenced to seven years in jail where he quickly falls into depression and becomes addicted to anti-depressants drugs. Even when Mickey is released from prison and despite Linda’s pleas, he cannot give them up. He becomes increasingly distant and Linda becomes lonely and frustrated. She secretly asks Edward to help them out as he is now a local town councillor. He helps them secure a new council home and a job for Mickey. However, Mickey is enraged when he finds out and pushes Linda away who goes to Edward for comfort. They are both quickly betrayed by Mrs Lyons who reveals the affair to Mickey. He then confronts Edward with a gun. Mrs Johnstone tries to intervene by revealing that they are twins but Mickey accidentally shoots Edward and the police then shoot Mickey dead.

The superstition made up by Mrs Lyons at the start of the play has now come true but the narrator questions whether this tragedy is due to superstition or actually due to the gap between the rich and the poor.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Plot

How many acts make up the play?

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How does the play’s ending link to the beginning?

To what extent can the ending be considered shocking?
Lesson 2: Context

There are a few key things it’s best to know about in terms of your historical context. These are great to add to your essays in order to boost your AO3 mark. Don’t just randomly babble on about things that aren’t relevant though – you won’t gain marks for this. When adding contextual links to your essay, make sure it can be clearly linked to the point your making and the question overall.

Biographical Context: Willy Russell

Willy Russell is a Liverpudlian born in 1947 from a working class family. He worked initially as a hairdresser but returned to college at the age of 20, qualified as a teacher and soon got into writing playscripts. His first play was ‘Keep Your Eyes Down’ (1971) about the Beatles. He then went on to write the successful ‘Educating Rita’ (1980) and ‘Blood Brothers’ in 1981 and ‘Shirley Valentine’ in 1988. His plays focus on how social class can cause barriers and unfairness. He also explores how social class affects our identity.

Social and Historical Context

LIVERPOOL

Liverpool was a successful port city in Victorian times but fell on hard times in the 20th century when port activity declined and the city had high unemployment and many strikes. Liverpudlians are famous for their warmth, hospitality and sense of humour. Mrs Johnstone is presented as a typical Liverpudlian.
UNEMPLOYMENT

Liverpool suffered from high unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s. Many factories were closing down and this affected many young people’s lives, including that of Mickey in the play. Traditional men who felt obliged to provide for their family were particularly hard hit and this often led people to crime.

MARRIAGE

The time period of the play is between the 1950’s to the 1970’s and this was a time when the nuclear, traditional family was seen as a vital building block of society. Marriage was seen as necessary prior to having children and pre-marital physical relationships were frowned upon. Divorce was also very uncommon.

EDUCATION

Grammar Schools

Grammar schools were the government-funded equivalent of English independent or private schools. They were free as long as you passed the tough 11+ examination which meant that most working class children were not capable of passing. Lower class children also could not finish their studies in grammar or state schools because they were often required to work as soon as they were of legal age.

Secondary Modern Schools

Most lower-class children attended the state schools, or modern ‘comprehensives’. These schools often did not have very good facilities or teaching. They were often very practical and trade based so that students could find a job in a certain field, like bricklaying, as soon as
they finished school. Very often, students left with no qualification, especially if they were considered to be weaker students.

**POVERTY**

**Council Housing**

Most working class people in the 1950’s and 1960’s were housed in cheap council houses which were cramped, without indoor plumbing or central heating. These houses were often located in unattractive inner-city locations with no space for children to play.

**‘New’ Towns**

The UK government tried to address the issue of run-down, inner-city housing by creating new council house in towns further out in the countryside, like Skelmersdale in the play. Many high rise blocks were also built.

**Tragic Genre**

The play ‘Blood Brothers’ uses many features from classical greek tragedy and this adds a weight of seriousness to the play. The narrator in the play has the role of the greek chorus which provides a commentary on the play and guides our reactions and interpretations. Mickey and Edward both share characteristics of the tragic hero whose end is predicted from the start of the play and both fall dramatically from their initial positions. A feature of the tragic hero is his or her ‘tragic flaw’ which brings about their downfall. In Mickey and Edward’s case, this flaw is imposed upon them. They are artificially placed into two opposing and adversarial classes which ends in conflict and destruction. The sense of ‘fate’ is probably one of the most evident tragic features of the play. Straight away we are informed that the twins
will die and their future seems to have already been decided for them by a power greater than any of them. Multiple deaths are another feature of Greek tragedy and by the end of the play the dead bodies of Mickey and Edward lay across the stage.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Context

When was Blood Brothers first written?

Name 2 other plays written by Willy Russell

What was unemployment like in Newcastle in the 1950s?
How does Mickey losing his job reflect the historical context?

How is education explored in the play in relation to the historical context?

How is marriage portrayed in the play and how does it link to the historical context?
Lesson 3: Mickey Johnstone

Whether you get a question about Mickey specifically, or you mention his character whilst talking about a theme, you need to know some key quotes and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and a further four with quotes to help you develop your own analysis. We’ve also linked some quotes to themes, so that you can double up on your revision for this as well!

“Mam, our Sammy’s robbed me other gun an’ that was me best one.”

(Mickey, Act One)

This is one of Mickey’s first lines in the play: “Mam, our Sammy’s robbed me other gun an’ that was me best one“. He is immediately associated with gun imagery and as a victim of his older brother Sammy’s exploitation. The gun imagery is a foreshadowing of the role of violence that will develop throughout Mickey’s life, first by being an accomplice in a botched robbery which ends up with the shooting of an innocent man. Mickey is persuaded to participate in this criminal activity by Sammy. The gun imagery is also central in the last scene of the play, with the accidental shooting of Edward, his twin.

“I’m not laughin’, I’m smilin’. I haven’t seen you happy like this for ages.” (Mickey, Act One)

1. How does this highlight the relationship between Mickey and his mum?
2. What does the adjective ‘happy’ suggest about Mickey’s view of his mum?
3. Would children normally notice something like this? What does it suggest?

“The words just disappear” (Mickey, Act Two)

1. How is Mickey characterised at this point in the play?
2. What does the verb ‘disappear’ suggest about Mickey’s personality?
3. Where else in the play can Mickey be seen as shy to the audience?
4. How does this contrast to Mickey’s characterisation at the end of the play?
“School is all boredom and futility” (Mickey’s new school, Act Two) Theme: social inequality

1. How does this quote reflect comprehensive schools at the time the play was written?
2. What are the connotations of the noun ‘boredom’?
3. What does ‘futility’ mean? What does it suggest about Mickey’s attitude towards school?

“Just one thing I had left, Eddie – Linda – an’ I wanted to keep her –” (Mickey, Act Two) Theme: social inequality

1. Why might the audience pity Mickey at this point?
2. How does this quote show Mickey’s fall from tragic hero?
3. How can this quote be considered ironic?

“How come you got everything…an’ I got nothin’?” (Mickey, Act Two) Theme: social inequality

1. What are the connotations of ‘everything’ and ‘nothing’?
2. What is the effect of the rhetorical question?
3. Explore the differences between Mickey and Edward, based on this quote.
Practice Question

How does Mickey’s desperation and depression lead to the tragic final scene of the play?

Exemplar Paragraph

Mickey experiences a series of mishaps which lead him down a dark and lonely path which ultimately results in his own death as well as that of his twin, Edward. Perhaps the most seminal event which started the downhill path was the loss of his job at the factory. He tells Edward that ‘I’ve been walking around all day, every day, looking for a job.’ Mickey never had great prospects for a lucrative or stable career because of the poor education he was given under the comprehensive modern secondary school system. He left with no qualifications and has no desirable skills that would attract an employer in the extremely competitive economic climate of the 1980’s recession. Now all he gets to experience is the cruel indifference of the world as he graphically describes ‘bein’ fucked off from everywhere’, with the terrifying prospect of being indefinitely on the dole, unable to support his growing family, with his manly pride wounded as he is no longer the dependable ‘provider’ that would have been the norm at the time.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Mickey Johnstone

How is Mickey presented as a boy at the start of the play?

How does Mickey relate to his mother?
How does Mickey relate to Edward?

What is Mickey like as a teenager?

How does Mickey change after becoming unemployed?
Why does Mickey end up shooting Edward?
Lesson 4: Edward Lyons

Whether you get a question about Edward specifically, or you mention his character whilst talking about a theme, you need to know some key quotes and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and a further four with quotes to help you develop your own analysis. These quotes could also be used if you had a question about social inequality, so that you can double up on your revision for this as well!

“Don’t you know what a dictionary is?”

(Edward, Act 1)

Edward shows evidence of his upper-middle class upbringing when he questions Mickey with ‘Don’t you know what a dictionary is?’ after Edward informs Mickey that he needs to look up the the ‘F-word’, which is clear evidence of the class divide separating them. Not only are they different in terms of material ease and comfort, prestige and status, but also in their use of language. Edward’s knowledge of standard English and academic practices such as using a dictionary will open doors for him in the future, allowing him to attend a private boarding school and university.

“Waiting for the ninety-two bus”

(Edward, Act 1)

1. Edward is copying what Mickey has said previously. How is Edward characterised at this point in the play?
2. To what extent can Edward be seen as showing off at this point in the play?
3. How does this subvert his middle-class upbringing?
“You can take a flying fuck at a rolling donut! But you shall not take my locket!”

(Edward, Act 2)

1. Can this quote be considered out of character for Edward, or a part of him growing up and being a ‘typical teenager’?
2. How could this be seen as shocking for the audience?
3. How can this be seen as a gesture of loyalty to Mrs Johnstone?
4. To what extent can this be seen as Edward having an emotional bond with Mrs Johnstone? He doesn’t know at this point that she is his mother.

“The thing is, I won’t be back until Christmas. Three months. Now you wouldn’t want me to continue in suspense for all that time, would you?” (Edward – Act 2)

1. How might the audience react to Edward revealing to Mickey and Linda last minute that he’s off to university?
2. Can Edward be considered as selfish or kind for doing this?
3. How does the phrase ‘I won’t be back until Christmas’ be linked to the difference in social class?
4. To what extent could the audience feel sympathy for Edward?

“It’s fantastic, I haven’t been to so many parties in my life.”

(Edward – Act 2)

1. What does the adjective ‘fantastic’ suggest about Edward’s new life at university?
2. How has Edward changed since the beginning of the play?
3. How does Edward’s new lifestyle emphasise the difference in class between him and Mickey?

“Live like a bohemian, tilt my hat to the world and say ‘screw you’” (Edward – Act 2)

1. This is in response to Mickey being unable to find work. How can this be seen as Edward not understanding what life is like for Mickey?
2. How does this quote reveal the class barrier between Edward and Mickey?
3. What words in this quote suggest that Edward has a romantic view of unemployment?
4. How is Edward characterised at this point in the play?
Practice Question

Explore the relationship between Edward and Mickey.

Exemplar Paragraph

Edward is a kind and sensitive boy, very similar to Mickey but lacking Mickey’s streetwise confidence. When Mickey impetuously asks him ‘Do you wanna be my blood brother, Eddie?’, Edward innocently and politely answers ‘Yes, please’, showing he is happy to be Mickey’s follower. This relationship continues much in the same vein throughout Edward’s childhood, as Edward both imitates Mickey’s informal language and mimics his daring, naughty behaviour.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Edward Lyons

How is Edward presented as a young child?

What is Edward’s relationship with his father like?

What is Edward’s relationship with his adopted mother like?
What is Edward’s relationship with Mickey like?

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What is Edward’s relationship with Mrs Johnstone like?

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How does Edward change as he becomes a teenager and returns from university?

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Lesson 5: Mrs Johnstone

Whether you get a question about Mrs Johnstone specifically, or you mention her character whilst talking about a theme, you need to know some key quotes and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and a further five with quotations to help you develop your own analysis.

These quotes could also be used if you had a question about social inequality, so that you can double up on your revision for this as well!

‘He told me I was sexier than Marilyn Monroe’

(Mrs Johnstone, Act 1)

Mrs Johnstone makes references to Marilyn Monroe throughout the play and this links to her desire to go beyond the rather stark and depressing reality. The actress Marilyn Monroe symbolises a glamorous and luxurious life of fame and ease that is far detached from the reality of Mrs Johnstone. It also links to a very superficial view of women, prized only for their beauty and sex appeal. Marilyn was very popular due to her looks and Mrs Johnstone is implying that her own beauty was her main asset which attracted her husband and inevitably led her into a hapless marriage. Finally, the movies that Marilyn Monroe would have acted in would have provided a form of ‘escapism’ for overworked and penniless housewives like Mrs Johnstone.
‘We went dancing’

(Mrs Johnstone, Act 1)

1. ‘Dancing’ is referenced frequently throughout the play. What could ‘dancing’ symbolise?
2. What does this quote tell us about Mrs Johnstone’s characterisation?

‘Nothing’s yours, on easy terms’

(Mrs Johnstone, Act 1)

1. What does the phrase ‘nothing’s yours’ suggest about Mrs Johnstone’s financial situation?
2. What are the connotations of the adjective ‘easy’?
3. What tone do you imagine Mrs Johnstone to say this in? Why?

‘During the dance, she acquires a brush, dusters and a mop’

(Mrs Johnstone, Act 1)

1. How do the stage directions mirror Mrs Johnstone’s social standing?
2. What do the props suggest about Mrs Johnstone’s job?
3. Despite the insinuation of the stage directions, Mrs Johnstone is still dancing. What does this suggest about how she feels about her social standing?

‘bright new day, we’re goin’ away’

(Mrs Johnstone, Act 1)

1. What tone do you imagine Mrs Johnstone to say this in? Why?
2. What does the phrase ‘new day’ imply?
3. What word class is ‘bright’ and what are the connotations?
'Tell me it’s not true…it’s only a game'

(Mrs Johnstone, Act 2)

1. These are the final lines in the song. What does this suggest?
2. What does the phrase ‘it’s only a game’ suggest? Remember, both her sons are dead at this point.
3. How is Mrs Johnstone characterised at this point in the play? How is it similar/different to how she’s characterised before this point?

Practice Question

What is Mrs Johnstone’s attitude towards the problems she faces in the play?

Exemplar Paragraph

Mrs Johnstone’s attitude to life is characterised by passiveness and unquestioning acceptance of the injustices that happen to her. The first example presented in the play is related to her husband who ‘walked out’ on her ‘a month or two ago’. She simply accepts this event without comment, bitterness or anger at the impossible situation he has placed her in. She never mentions any attempts to ask her husband for financial, moral or practical support in raising their seven children.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Mrs Johnstone

How is Mrs Johnstone’s presented as a typical, Liverpudlian, lower-class woman?

What kind of mother is Mrs Johnstone? How is she similar or different to Mrs Lyons?
How does Mrs Johnstone deal with the difficulties she faces in life?

What kind of mother is Mrs Johnstone?
What does Mrs Johnstone expect of her move to Skelmersdale?

How does Mrs Johnstone react to Linda and Edward’s affair?
How does Mrs Johnstone react to the deaths of Edward and Mickey?
Lesson 6: Mrs Lyons

Whether you get a question about Mrs Lyons specifically, or you mention her character whilst talking about a theme, you need to know some key quotes and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and a further five with quotes to help you develop your own analysis.

“I believe that an adopted child can become one’s own”

(Mrs Lyons – Act 1)

Mrs Lyons has definite, strong opinions and she demonstrates this when she states ‘I believe that an adopted child can become one’s own’. After suffering the heartache of possibly multiple miscarriages and fertility issues, she has given up on conceiving a biological child of her own. Therefore, in her own methodical and logical way of thinking, adopting a child is the next course of action. She is perhaps a bit naïve in her belief that the child can be like her own flesh and blood and she does not give a second thought to the possible attachment issues that might arise. The use of the possessive adjective ‘own’ is a foreshadowing of her controlling behaviour towards Eddie which will lead to conflict and bitterness.

“How can you possibly avoid some of them being put into care?”

(Mrs Lyons Act 1)

1. How is Mrs Lyons characterised in this quote?
2. What word class is ‘possibly’ and what are the connotations?
3. What does the phrase ‘put into care’ suggest about the difference in social status between Mrs Lyons and Mrs Johnstone?
‘You’ll be locked up. You sold your baby.’

(Mrs Lyons, Act 1)

1. How is Mrs Lyons characterised here compared to the beginning of the play?
2. To what extent can Mrs Lyons be seen as immoral and manipulative here?
3. There are two short sentences here, what tone does this create?

‘Edward is my son. Mine.’

(Mrs Lyons – Act 1)

1. What are the connotations of the possessive pronouns ‘my’ and ‘mine’?
2. What tone do you imagine Mrs Lyons would say this in?
3. How is Mrs Lyons characterised at this point?

‘…you’re not the same as him. You’re not, do you understand?’

(Mrs Lyons – Act 1)

1. How does this quote also explore social class/class prejudice?
2. There’s repetition of the pronoun ‘you’. What does this suggest?
3. How can the phrase ‘you’re not the same as him’ be seen as ironic?

‘You have ruined me.’

(Mrs Lyons – Act 2)

1. To what extent does this quote portray Mrs Lyons as selfish?
2. What word class is ‘ruined’ and what are the connotations?
3. How does this representation of Mrs Lyons contrast to her earlier on in the play?
**Practice Question**

How is Mrs Lyons presented as a dishonest and manipulative woman?

**Exemplar Paragraph**

Mrs Lyons seems to have her own agenda, to acquire a son of her own, and she single-mindedly pursues her goal, to the detriment of all around her, even her own adopted son, Edward. She lies outright to her own husband about the true identity of Edward. Even though she knew that ‘he wanted his own son, not someone else’s’, she lies to him about needing money in order to pay off Mrs Lyons so that she could have Edward all to herself. She does not consider the unethical nature of her actions and what they could lead to.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Mrs Lyons

How does Mrs Lyons reveal her manipulative and dishonest character?

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Lesson 7: Linda

Whether you get a question about Linda specifically, or you mention her character whilst talking about a theme, you need to know some key quotes and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and a further four with quotes to help you develop your own analysis.

‘Linda moves in to protect Mickey who is visibly shaken.’

(Stage Directions – Act 1)

Linda as a young girl is presented as Mickey’s ally and protector. The stage directions state that ‘Linda moves in to protect Mickey who is visibly shaken’ after the other children tease Mickey that he will die after swearing. She is a strong female figure going against the gender stereotypes of the time, saving the helpless male. This strong, caring side stays with her throughout her adulthood when she is dealing with the more complex issues of Mickey’s unemployment and depression and she tries to find a solution of sorts by asking for Edward’s help.

‘Everybody does. Like your twinny died, didn’t he…’

(Linda – Act 1)

1. What does this quote suggest about Linda’s personality?
2. To what extent can it be argued that Linda cares for Mickey?

‘You better hadn’t do anything soft, like him.’

(Linda – referring to Sammy – Act 2)

1. What is Linda referring to when she says ‘anything soft’?
2. What does ‘like him’ suggest about Linda’s opinion of Sammy?
'I don’t care who knows. I just love you. I love you!'

(Linda – Act 2)

1. How is Linda characterised at this point in the play?
2. The phrase ‘love you’ is repeated. What does this imply about Linda’s feelings?
3. ‘I don’t care who knows’ is a short statement. What effect does this have on the audience?

'a game of piggy-in-the-middle'

(Linda– Act 2)

1. What are the connotations of the game ‘piggy-in-the-middle’?
2. How could this phrase be seen in a different light as the trio get older?
3. Why might the audience dislike Linda as an adult, considering how much she claims to love Mickey?

'An’ what about what I need? I need you.’

(Linda– Act 2)

1. What do you think are Linda’s needs as a wife and mother?
2. To what extent would the audience feel sympathy for Linda at this point in the play?
Practice Question

Is Linda presented as a stereotypical female of the 1970’s and 1980’s?

Exemplar Paragraph

Linda is initially presented as a feisty, assertive and confident young girl, going against the stereotype of timid and weak female. She is the one who comes to Mickey’s ‘rescue’ when he is being teased by the other children that he will die. She tells off a whole group of boys, declaring ‘Leave him alone!’ and even successfully stands up to Sammy, who is the toughest of the group and could be quite intimidating: ‘I’ll tell my mother why all her ciggies always disappear when you’re in our house’. She is clever, quick-thinking and not willing to take on a stereotypical passive role.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Linda

How does Linda help Mickey as a child?

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How is Linda presented as a teenager?

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How does Linda try to support Mickey as an adult?

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What causes Linda to betray Mickey?

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Lesson 8: Minor Characters

NARRATOR

It’s unlikely you will get a question about the narrator specifically, but you can use quotes whilst talking about a theme, you need to know some key quotes and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and one more to help you develop your own analysis.

‘A debt is a debt, and must be paid’

(Narrator – Act 1)

One of the narrator’s often repeated lines is ‘a debt is a debt, and must be paid’. This could be interpreted in two different ways. This could refer to the physical money that Mrs Johnston received from Mrs Lyons in exchange for her baby or it could refer to her ‘moral debt’ which she must pay for irresponsibly and heartlessly giving up her son. The repetition of this line at various times throughout the play builds up an ominous atmosphere which primes the audience for a tragic ending.

‘Who’d dare tell the lambs in Spring, What fate the later seasons bring.’

(Narrator – Act 2)

1. How does this quote foreshadow the play’s dark ending?
2. How could the imagery be seen as biblical?
3. What are the connotations of a lamb?
MR LYONS

It’s unlikely you will get a question about Mr Lyons specifically, but you can use quotes whilst talking about a theme, you need to know some key quotes and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and one more to help you develop your own analysis.

‘Mummy will read the story, Edward. I’ve got to go to work for an hour.’

(Mr Lyons – Act 1)

Mr Lyons is presented as a distant father, with few emotional ties to Edward. He tells Edward that ‘Mummy will read the story, Edward. I’ve got to go to work for an hour.’ He does not appreciate the hurt he is causing Edward through his indifference and he clearly prioritises his work as CEO of a large industrial complex over spending time with his family. As a capitalist, he values money-making above human ties.

‘Frightened of what, woman?’

(Mr Lyons – Act 1)

1. How is Mr Lyons characterised?
2. What tone do you imagine Mr Lyons to say this in? Why?
3. He refers to Mrs Lyons using the generalised noun ‘woman’ – what does this tell us about his relationship with her?

SAMMY

It’s unlikely you will get a question about Sammy specifically, but you can use quotes whilst talking about a theme, you need to know some key quotes and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and one more to help you develop your own analysis.
‘The children are ‘led by Sammy’ and say that he’s ‘gonna die’”

(Stage Directions – Act 1)

Sammy is presented as a leader of a small gang of children at the start of the play. The children are ‘led by Sammy’ and mimic him in his cruel and taunting ways when he teases Mickey that he’s ‘gonna die’. His tendency towards aggression and delinquency foreshadow his turning to crime as an adult. He is also presented as selfish and insensitive, ignoring his younger brother’s fears and agitation.

‘Sammy splits out the back. Mickey remains silently crying.’

(Stage Directions– Act 1)

1. Sammy runs when Mickey is caught – what does this suggest about his characterisation?
2. How does this quote reflect Sammy’s thoughts/feelings about family?
3. What word class is ‘splits’? What are the connotations?
Practice Question

How do the minor characters of the play prepare the audience for the ultimate tragedy of the play?

Exemplar Paragraph

The narrator is the most obvious character linked to the theme of tragedy. His constant presence throughout the play, wearing the black undertaker’s suit, alerts the audience to the theme of death and destruction. He creates a threatening atmosphere by repeating the phrase ‘the devil’s got your number’, causing the audience to imagine evil forces at play, conspiring and plotting to destroy the lives of the characters in the play. He hints that a great sin has taken place, the abandonment of a baby by its mother but never allows us to take a more compassionate and understanding view of Mrs Johnstone’s predicament as an abandoned, lower-class wife of 7 children. He is the harsh voice of fate which blindly is foreshadowing the destruction of Edward and Mickey, similar to the harsh and indifferent socio-economic forces which daily crush the hopes and lives of millions in society.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Minor Characters

How does Mr Lyons relate to his son, Edward?
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How does Mr Lyons relate to his wife, Mrs Lyons?
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What is Sammy’s role in the play?

How does Sammy treat Mickey?

How does the narrator provide foreshadowing throughout the play?
Lesson 9: Violence

Violence is a key theme in the play because it’s so apparent from an early age with the characters. You need to know a variety of key quotes from different characters which fit the theme, and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and a further three with questions to help you develop your own analysis.

‘You can get up off the ground again/It doesn’t matter, the whole things just a game’

(Mickey – Act 1)

The children in the play are linked to violence from a very young age. At the beginning of the play, when the children are ‘killed’, they can get back up and rejoin the game which implies a sense of childhood innocence. However, this game foreshadows the violence the audience witnesses at the end of the play, with both Mickey and Edward unable to get ‘back off the ground again’ and carry on. The noun ‘game’ has connotations of fun and laughter, which creates an ironic tone as the audience are already told about the tragic ending at the beginning of the play.

‘Mrs Lyons attacks, Mrs Johnstone grabs her and brings her to her knees’

(Stage directions – Act 2)

1. What word class is ‘attacks’ and what does this suggest about Mrs Lyons’ character?
2. How might the audience react to this when watching the play? Why?
3. Think about how this would look on stage – what does it suggest about class and status?
'Wherever I go, you’ll be just behind me. I know that now… always and forever and ever like, like a shadow'

(Mrs Lyons – Act 2)

1. To what extent does this quote imply that Mrs Lyons regrets convincing Mrs Johnstone to give up her child?
2. What does the phrase ‘always and forever’ suggest about how Mrs Lyons is feeling at this point?
3. What does the simile ‘like a shadow’ imply?
4. To what extent is Mrs Lyons talking about herself and her own decision?

'Mickey waves at Edward with his gun hand. The gun explodes and blows Edward apart.'

(Stage directions – Act 2)

1. The quote is split into two short statements. What effect does this have?
2. What word class is ‘explodes’ and what are the connotations?
3. To what extent does the phrase ‘blows Edward apart’ create a shocking ending? What effect is Russell trying to have on the audience? (Remember, we’re already told at the start of the play that the pair will die)
Practice Question

How does Russell explore the theme of violence in the play?

Exemplar Paragraph

The first indication of violence we see in the play is at the beginning, when the children are play fighting during the song “Kids’ Play”. The lyrics state ‘You can get back off the ground again/The whole thing’s just a game’. At this point, the audience already knows what will happen at the end of the play, so it creates a sense of dramatic irony, as Mickey and Edward are unable to ‘get back off the ground again’. The use of the noun ‘game’ implies a sense of childhood innocence, however it also foreshadows the violence to come later on in the play. As the children grow older, violence becomes more real and threatening, especially through Sammy’s character, who commits murder during a robbery gone wrong. This also emphasises the lack of choice people from lower class backgrounds had in Liverpool during this time. With unemployment rising, men felt they had no other choice, trying to support their families by any means necessary.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Violence

How is violence first portrayed in the play?

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How do guns become a symbol in the play?

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Which character/s would you associate with this theme? Why?

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What are the links between violence and class?

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Lesson 10: Fate & Superstition

Fate & Superstition are key themes in the play because, arguably, the events in the play wouldn’t have happened without Mrs Johnstone’s superstitious nature. You need to know a variety of key quotes from different characters which fit the theme, and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and a further five with questions to help you develop your own analysis.

‘You never put new shoes on the table.’

(Mrs Johnstone – Act 1)

Mrs Johnstone is shown as a superstitious person from the start of the play when she is absolutely horrified that Mrs Lyons has just put a pair of new shoes on the table. This links to her working class background as Mrs Lyons is shown as having no understanding of this superstition. There is no rational explanation for this strange belief. However, this incident reveals Mrs Johnstone’s fears and weakness and this allows Mrs Lyons to exploit her. She manipulates Mrs Johnstone through her superstitious fears and convinces her not to tell anyone about the separation of the twins.

‘They … they say that if either twin learns that he once was a pair, they shall both immediately die.’

(Mrs Lyons – Act 1)

1. How has Mrs Lyons manipulated the situation here to suit her own desires?
2. How can this be considered dramatic irony? What do the audience know that the characters stage don’t?
3. What word class is ‘immediately’ and what effect does it create?
4. How does Mrs Lyons use the pronoun ‘they’ to distance herself from her manipulation?
‘Edward is ‘drawn to’ the Johnstones / ‘something terrible will happen’

(Edward – Act 1)

1. What does this suggest about Edward’s ‘bond’ with the Johnstone family?
2. What word class is ‘terrible’ and what are the connotations?
3. To what extent might the audience feel sympathy for Edward at this point?
4. What is the ‘something terrible’ that ‘will happen’?

‘Y’ know the devil’s got your number / Y’know he’s gonna find y’

(Narrator – Act 1)

1. How does the narrator reinforce the idea of fate by using these words?
2. What would you associate the ‘devil’ with?
3. What atmosphere do these words create?

‘walking on the pavement cracks’ / ‘a looking glass cracked’

(Narrator – Act 2)

1. What are these quotes examples of? What do we associate these with?
2. How do these words reflect working-class attitudes?
3. What atmosphere do these words create?

‘Do we blame superstition for what came to pass? Or could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class?’

(Narrator Act 2)

1. What is Willy Russell questioning here?
2. To what extent is this a reminder of social inequality?
3. What is the significance of Russell’s use of the collective pronoun ‘the English’?
Practice Question

How does Russell explore the theme of superstition and fate in Blood Brothers?

Exemplar Paragraph

Superstition is linked to social class from the start of the play as Mrs Johnstone is deeply superstitious as demonstrated by the ‘shoes on the table’ incident. Mrs Lyons, who starts off by ridiculing superstitions, picks up on Mrs Johnstone’s irrational but very real panic at this seemingly innocent action. She decides to exploit this weak point of Mrs Johnstone’s character which is usually associated with the less educated, working classes and she fabricates a new superstition of her own regarding twins which are separated at birth. This superstition is then used as a motif throughout the play to indicate a sense of doomed fate for both brothers. This is reinforced by the narrator who could be seen as representing an unemotional and pitiless force of fate, constantly reminding us of the imminent death of the brothers.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Fate & Superstition

How does Mrs Lyons take advantage of Mrs Johnstone’s beliefs in superstition?

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How does the narrator contribute to the sense of fate playing a role in the destiny of the twins?

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How does Russell challenge the belief in superstition bringing about the twins’ death?
Lesson 11: Social Inequality

Social Inequality is a key theme in the play because the differences between the working and middle classes are so apparent throughout the play. You need to know a variety of key quotes from different characters which fit the theme, and be able to analyse them in detail. Luckily, there’s one below with a possible interpretation and a further five with questions to help you develop your own analysis.

‘He’d have all his own toys and a garden to play in.’

(Mrs Lyons – Act 1)

Mrs Lyons indicates all the material things she will be able to give her new ‘adopted’ baby. These are all things that Mrs Johnstone is not capable of offering due to her working class background. Mrs Lyons’ vision might be typical of a middle-class childhood, but is completely out of reach for Mrs Johnstone. We quickly understand that there is a huge divide between them. Mrs Lyons view of her maternal role is to provide material comforts and distractions rather the love and care which is what Mrs Johnstone offers to her children.

‘Fantastic. When I get home I’ll look it up in the dictionary.’

(Edward – Act 1)

1. What word class is ‘fantastic’ and what are the connotations?
2. What tone do you imagine Edward to say this in? What does this tell us about his character?
3. What are the connotations of a dictionary and how does it link to social class?
‘Next week I’ll be earning and there’ll be loads of stuff to eat’

(Mrs Johnstone – Act 1)

1. How does this quote emphasise Mrs Johnstone’s social class?
2. What does this highlight about the difference between the Johnstone family and the Lyons family?
3. What tone do you imagine Mrs Johnstone to say this in? What does this tell us about her character?

‘He’s a good lad’

(Mrs Johnstone – Act 1)

1. Mrs Johnstone is talking about Mickey here. What event from the play is she referring to?
2. How is this event an example of social inequality?
3. What word class is ‘good’ and what are the connotations?

‘So you’re not working. Why is it so important?’

(Edward – Act 2)

1. How does this quote highlight the difference in social class between Edward and Mickey?
2. Why is it important for Mickey to be working?
3. Why do you think Edward doesn’t understand?

‘I could have been him!’

(Mickey – Act 2)

1. How does the use of exclamation mark emphasise this phrase?
2. Why could Mickey be seen as jealous of Edward here?
3. If Mickey had the same opportunities as Edward, would the play have ended differently? Why/why not?
Practice Question

How does Russell explore the theme of social class and inequality in Blood Brothers?

Exemplar Paragraph

When the twins grow up, they are pulled apart by their social differences. Edward is shown as unable to empathise with Mickey’s situation which is leading him to desperation and frustration. He flippantly comments ‘If I couldn’t get a job I’d just say sod it and draw the dole, live like a… bohemian’. His use of informal language is perhaps a failed attempt to use the language of the working classes to show that he is similar to Mickey. However this is ironically contrasted with his use of the noun ‘bohemian’ which is associated with a free-spirited, intelligent and usually educated middle to upper class individual who chooses to withdraw from conventional society in order to indulge his own passions and hobbies, often leading a very decadent and indulgent lifestyle. He cannot understand how urgent it is for Mickey to be the breadwinner of the family in order to provide for his family’s basic needs such as food and shelter. Edward has the financial safety-net guaranteed by his middle-class family and cannot imagine not having a comfortable life of ease and privilege.
Blood Brothers Worksheet: Social Inequality

How does Russell show us the unfairness created by the class divide?

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Why is education important in creating the class divide?

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How do Mickey and Edward initially bridge the class divide?

How does the class divide come between Mickey and Edward and lead to the tragic end?
Lesson 12: Extra Revision Materials

Childhood & Growing Up

Childhood and growing up is a theme that Willy Russell touches upon in the play, even though we may not consider it a major theme compared to others.

When we think of this theme, the characters that immediately spring to mind are Mickey and Edward. However, don’t forget about the change in characters such as Linda, who starts off very strong and independent, but reflects a typical housewife by the end of the play. Does Sammy change at all in the play and how can this be explored in relation to the theme?

Below are some questions and activities to get you thinking about the theme in more detail.

1 How does Mickey feel about being aged seven at the start of the play?

2 How is Mickey and Edward’s childhood presented in the play?

3 How are Mickey and Edward presented as teenagers?

4 Why do Mickey and Edward drift apart as they become young adults?

5 How and why do the characters below change as they transition from childhood to adulthood?
   - Edward
   - Mickey
   - Sammy
   - Linda

6 To what extent do you think Russell presents childhood as a time of innocence?
Structure & Form

Whilst you may not get a question specifically about structure and form, knowing about it and using it in an essay is a great way to show the examiner you know your stuff.

The play is structured into two acts, starting in the 1950s. Act one is based around Mickey and Edward’s childhood, whereas act two uses a combination of montages and time hops to explore the characters as they move into their teenage years and then on to adulthood. Aside from the opening of the play, in which the audience are informed of the death of the brothers, the play follows a chronological order.

The play uses many features from classical greek tragedy and this adds a weight of seriousness to the play. The narrator in the play has the role of the greek chorus which provides a commentary on the play and guides our reactions and interpretations.

Mickey and Edward both share characteristics of the tragic hero whose end is predicted from the start of the play and both fall dramatically from their initial positions. A feature of the tragic hero is his or her ‘tragic flaw’ which brings about their downfall. In Mickey and Edward’s case, this flaw is imposed upon them. They are artificially placed into two opposing and adversarial classes which ends in conflict and destruction.

Below are some questions and activities to get you thinking about structure and form in more detail.

1 What is the effect of the audience finding out about the death of the brothers at the beginning of the play?
2 How is dramatic irony created when the twins become ‘blood brothers’?
3 Which character does Russell use to represent the greek chorus?
4 What is Mickey’s fatal flaw?
5 What is Edward’s fatal flaw?
6 The play contains a moral warning/message for the audience. What is it?
Imagery & Symbolism

Marilyn Monroe

Mrs Johnstone mentions Marilyn Monroe a few times throughout the play, especially at the start during her song. First off, it comes across as a compliment that her husband said she was ‘sexier than Marilyn Monroe’ as she is seen as a figure of glamour and wealth. However, as the play continues, we begin to see parallels with some of the negativity surrounding the movie star. Mrs Johnstone even compares Mickey’s addiction to antidepressants to Marilyn Monroe’s addiction to prescription drugs, showing that she is yet another tragic example of a life that has been changed due to negative circumstances.

Guns

Guns first show up in act one with the children all out and playing gun games. This seemingly harmless game foreshadows the harsher, more sinister violence that builds in act two, when Mickey is involved in a robbery gone wrong through Sammy’s influence. Russell cleverly demonstrates that guns can cause violence in a variety of situations: Sammy shooting someone during the robbery, Mickey shooting Edward accidentally and then being shot by the police as a result.

Shoes on the Table

Although the shoes are only seen at the beginning of the play, shoes on the table becomes a visual symbol of Mrs Johnstone’s fear surrounding the superstition. Mrs Lyons uses this fear to keep Mrs Johnstone quiet about her decision to give up one of her twins. The Narrator constantly refers to the shoes on the table, amongst other symbols of bad luck, to remind the audience of the fate of the brothers.
Edward’s Locket

The locket is given to Edward by Mrs Johnstone before he moves away. It contains a picture of Mrs Johnstone and Mickey, which he doesn’t know is his mother and brother. Unknowingly, it becomes a symbol of his biological family and more importantly, his bond with Mickey. Looking at the nature versus nurture debate, this could also be Russell siding with nature; although Edward has been separated from his blood relations, he still feels a powerful connection with them.

Prescription Drugs

Mickey ends up having a mental breakdown whilst in prison and is prescribed anti-depressants, which he becomes addicted to. His refusal to stop taking them becomes a symbol of how far Mickey has fallen and what he has lost since losing his job and ending up in prison. In the play as a whole, Russell uses the pills to represent the struggle of addiction, and how people turn to them when faced with tough circumstances.

Practice Questions

1 How are class differences presented in Blood Brothers?

2 “Wherever I go you’ll be just behind me… always and forever… like a shadow” Explore how Russell presents the conflict between Mrs Lyons and Mrs Johnstone throughout the play.

3 How is setting used in the play to explore social class?

4 Explain how the theme of fate and superstition is explored in the play.

5 How and why does Linda change in Blood Brothers?

6 Explore the characterisation of both Mickey and Edward in Blood Brothers.

7 How does Russell explore the theme of friendship in the play?

8 Explain how Russell explores ideas about upbringing in the play.

9 How is Sammy used to represent violence in Blood Brothers?

10 To what extent can the narrator be seen as central to the play?
Blood Brothers – Exam Style Question

How are class differences presented in Blood Brothers?

Write about:

• How class differences are explored through Russell’s choice of characters

• How Russell presents class differences through the way he writes

Grade 5 Example Paragraph

In act one, Mrs Johnstone is eager to find stable employment, a constant concern of the working classes where jobs were often unstable and poorly paid. She says “next week I’ll be earning and there’ll be loads of stuff to eat”. Even though the word ‘loads’ is used, she just wants to ensure she can meet the basic needs of her family at a time when malnutrition was rife in inner city council estates. She does not even consider anything beyond her most essential needs whilst the middle classes did not give a second thought to having three square meals a day.

Grade 9 Example Paragraph

At the end of the play, Mickey exclaims ‘I could have been him!’ The use of the exclamation mark at the end, teamed with the short sentence conveys a sense of exasperation at Mickey’s social standing in comparison to his brother’s. Mickey shows real regret for his situation and jealousy for Edward’s privileged life when he discovers that they are twins. At the final climax of the play, this short, simple sentence shows his pain and agony over his circumstances. The phrase ‘could have’ emphasises how different Mickey’s life could have been if he were the twin given to Mrs Lyons. This fact highlights how different the class gap is, despite living in such close proximity throughout the play. The author chooses to highlight that Mickey and Edward’s lives have been greatly affected by the different opportunities they have had. This is directly linked to social class rather than personality or superstition as was initially suggested by the narrator. If Mickey had had the same opportunities as Edward, the tragic ending could very well have been avoided.