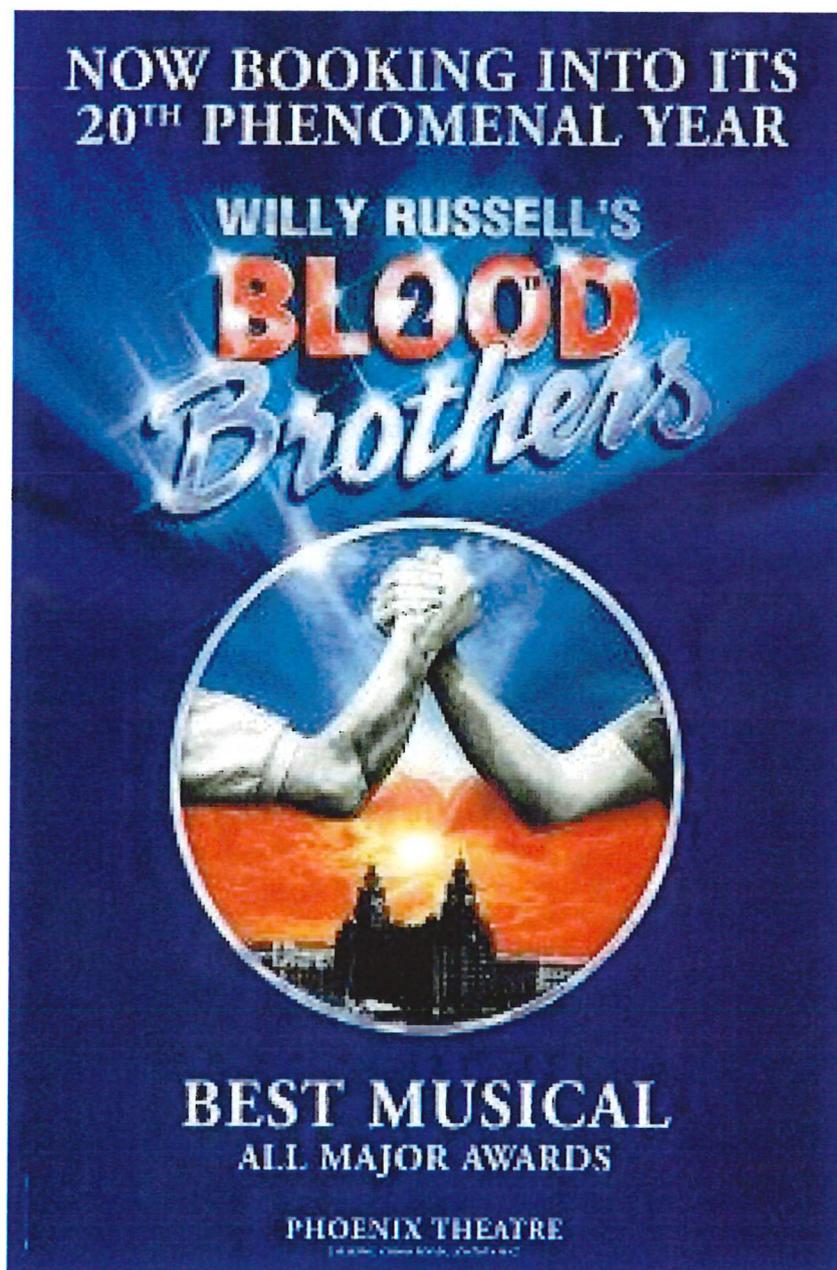


**GCSE Drama**  
**Blood Brothers**  
**Section B**





## Blood Brothers - The Story

**Blood Brothers** is a story about a superstition - the curse of the separated twins.

This curse (made up by the author Willy Russell) states that when twins are secretly parted, if either twin learns that he was once a pair, both twins shall immediately die.

### A Cursed Agreement

At the start of the story, the Narrator introduces the story of the Johnstone twins, "as like each other as two new pins" and how they died "never knowing that they shared one name till the day they died". He invites you to judge for yourself how their mother - according to the legend "so cruel there's a stone in place of her heart" - came to play her part.

**Blood Brothers** begins and ends with Mrs Johnstone. Once a beautiful young woman, she sings about how she was duped by a smooth-talking man, who told her she was "like Marilyn Monroe". They go dancing, get married, have lots of children - and then he leaves her, looking old before her time.

Mrs Johnstone struggles to cope. Her home is poor, and she lives from 'the catalogue' - "on the never never". She finds it hard to say no and is in constant money trouble. She is weak-willed, superstitious, and easily bullied. Her children are wild and badly behaved - 'The Welfare' continually threatens to take them from her.

Things seem to be looking up when she gets a cleaning job for a Mrs Lyons - only for then to be shattered again when she finds she is expecting twins.

Although she is rich and middle-class, Mrs Lyons is just as sad as Mrs Johnstone, in her own way. Unable to have children, and with a husband who frequently works away, she is lonely and unfulfilled. When she hears that Mrs Johnstone is expecting twins, she persuades her to hand one over to her - to pretend that it is her own child.

Agreeing at first, Mrs Johnstone has second thoughts when the twins are born, but Mrs Lyons bullies her into giving her one of the twins - "We made an agreement, a bargain. You swore on the Bible..."

Mrs Johnstone thinks she will still see her lost son when she goes cleaning, but Mrs Lyons becomes increasingly jealous and eventually sacks her. And when Mrs

Johnstone threatens to tell someone, she is silenced when Mrs Lyons tells her the curse of the separated twins - "You won't tell anyone about this, Mrs Johnstone, because if you do, you will kill them".

At this point, the Narrator lists a whole string of omens of disaster - shoes upon the table, the salt's been spilled, someone broke the looking glass. The play has a sense of doom from this point, as events work themselves out to fulfil the prophecy - "Now you know the devil's got your number. He's gonna find you. You know he's right behind you."

### Children

The next time we meet the characters is when the twins are aged 7 - nearly eight. Mickey Johnstone, while playing Cowboys and Indians, wanders up the 'posh end' of the neighbourhood and bumps into Edward Lyons. Finding they share the same birthday, they become immediate friends. One day, they decide to become 'blood brothers'. Mickey envies Edward his sweets and toys; Edward envies Mickey his naughty adventures and knowledge of swear-words. Both long to be 'in the other's shoes'.

When they find out, both mothers try to stop the children meeting, but the bond is too strong, and the boys disobey their parents to meet each other, and a mutual friend, Linda.

Ominously, their favourite game is cops and robbers, and they have gangster-like pretend 'shoot-outs' - they get 'shot' and 'die', "but you know if you cross your fingers and if you count from one to ten, you can get up off the ground again. It really doesn't matter the whole thing's just a game".

The idea of 'class' comes into many of Willy Russell's plays, and there is a telling scene when the three land up in trouble with the police. Whereas Mickey is returned home with threats of court and prison, Edward is taken home with a smile and the reassurance that it was "just a prank ... he's a good lad".

Mrs Lyons, increasingly mentally unstable, persuades her husband to move to the country. But then Mrs Johnstone, equally, is re-housed nearby on a new out-of-town council estate (where they only fight at weekends). Thus, fate throws the two boys together again when they meet by chance, aged 14.

A visit to the pictures and a meeting with Linda re-unites the threesome, and this time they run away from the police! Both boys fancy Linda, but Edward is much too shy to tell her.

## Depression...

The boys' friendship, however, finds itself tested by fate, and class. Edward goes to university, returns to a successful career and becomes a local Councillor. Mickey gets a job he hates in a local factory, and he marries Linda because she gets pregnant.

But then there is a downturn in the economy, and Mickey loses his job. To Edward, not having to work seems rather fun, but Mickey tells him that he doesn't know what he is talking about. The two part angrily. Instead, Mickey gets in with his criminal elder brother Sammy, and is persuaded to take part in a robbery in which the night watchman is shot. Mickey is sent to prison for 7 years.

When he comes out, Mickey is a broken man, depressed, hopeless, and dependent on pills. Linda is reduced to despair ... and turns to her influential friend, Councillor Edward Lyons, for help.

During this time, Linda becomes aware of the fun she has lost ("There's a girl inside the women who's waiting to get free. She's washed a million dishes and she's always making tea") and she and Edward fall in love - "nothing cruel, nothing wrong, just two fools who know the rules but break them all, and grasp at half a chance to play their part in light romance".

## ... and Disaster

At this point, Mrs Lyons tells Mickey about the relationship between Linda and Edward. Mickey - who has stopped taking the pills to try to rebuild his life with Linda -explodes: "There's a man gone mad, lost his mind tonight ... there's a mad man running round and round" says the Narrator. Linda, terrified, runs to tell Mrs Johnstone, who sets off to find him...

And so the scene is set for the final disaster.

Edward Lyons is speaking in the Council Chamber when Mickey bursts in with a gun.

He is going to kill Edward for taking Linda from him, but he can't bring himself to do it.

Armed police arrive... and so does Mrs Johnstone:

"Mickey. Don't shoot Eddie. He's your brother. You had a twin brother. I couldn't afford to keep both of you. His mother couldn't have kids. I agreed to give one of you away!"

Mickey, who had been lapsing into despair, becomes uncontrollable with rage:

"Why didn't you give me away! I could have been ... him!"

He waves the gun at Edward to point at him.

As he does this, the gun goes off and kills Edward, and the police immediately shoot Mickey dead too.

The play ends with Mrs Johnstone left singing: 'Tell me it's not true'.

At the start of the play, the narrator invites the audience to judge Mrs Johnstone.

At the end of the play, he asks them a different question:

"And do we blame superstition for what came to pass?

Or could it be what we, the English, have come to know as 'class'?"

## Plot Gap Fill

### Act 1:

Blood Brothers begins at the \_\_\_\_\_ of the story, with the deaths of Mickey and Edward. We then go back into the \_\_\_\_\_ to discover why the boys died. The mother of both boys, Mrs , \_\_\_\_\_ is introduced by the \_\_\_\_\_ who tells \_\_\_\_\_ the that she gave her \_\_\_\_\_ away and that she has a ' \_\_\_\_\_ ' in place of a heart. We then meet Mrs Johnstone who gives us a quick synopsis of her \_\_\_\_\_. We discover that she is a \_\_\_\_\_ mother with 7 \_\_\_\_\_ to look after. She tells us that her \_\_\_\_\_ has walked out on her for a woman and that she is expecting another \_\_\_\_\_ soon.

*Audience beginning life children child stone end baby  
Narrator husband single Johnstone younger*

Following this opening scene the setting changes to Mrs \_\_\_\_\_ house where Mrs Johnstone works as a \_\_\_\_\_. We discover that Mrs Lyons is unable to have \_\_\_\_\_ but she desperately wants one and when Mrs Johnstone announces that she is pregnant with \_\_\_\_\_ Mrs Lyons suggests that Mrs Johnstone should \_\_\_\_\_ one to her. Mrs Johnstone initially \_\_\_\_\_ the idea but Mrs Lyons puts \_\_\_\_\_ on her and reminds her that social services will put one of her children into \_\_\_\_\_ because she can't look after them properly. Finally Mrs Johnstone agrees and they swear on the \_\_\_\_\_ to always keep the deal a \_\_\_\_\_. To frighten the

\_\_\_\_\_ Mrs Johnstone into silence, Mrs Lyons tells her that if the twins ever discover they were once a \_\_\_\_\_ they will immediately \_\_\_\_\_.

*Cleaner care give pressure superstitious rejects secret Lyons' twins  
pair children Bible die*

Mickey and Edward meet, aged \_\_\_\_\_. We see that even though they are \_\_\_\_\_ almost \_\_\_\_\_ (sharing the same biological parents) they have been brought up in contrasting \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and are very \_\_\_\_\_ children. However, Mickey and Edward fast become \_\_\_\_\_ and discover that they share the same \_\_\_\_\_. Mickey declares that they are \_\_\_\_\_ and they make a \_\_\_\_\_ (reminiscent of Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons) and declare \_\_\_\_\_ to one another and swear they will be friends until they \_\_\_\_\_. Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons discover that the twins have become friends and, afraid their \_\_\_\_\_ will be discovered, forbid the boys from seeing each other. Edward argues with Mrs Lyons and she \_\_\_\_\_ him. Later, Edward sneaks out to play with Mickey and Linda and Mrs Lyons becomes almost \_\_\_\_\_.

*Families birthday different identical blood brothers genetically seven  
loyalty pact hysterical friends die environments secret hits*

## Act 2:

At the start of Act 2 \_\_\_\_\_ more years have passed and the twins are \_\_\_\_\_. Mrs Johnstone has made a new life for herself and appears much \_\_\_\_\_. Mickey is in love with \_\_\_\_\_ but is \_\_\_\_\_ about it and Edward is away at \_\_\_\_\_. Although things are a lot better for Mrs Johnstone we see that her children are still causing \_\_\_\_\_; Sammy pulls a knife out on the \_\_\_\_\_ and Mickey gets \_\_\_\_\_ from school. We learn that Edward too has been suspended for \_\_\_\_\_ at a teacher and while he is back home the twins meet up again. They are excited and quickly \_\_\_\_\_ their good friendship. However, Mrs Lyons is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_: she moved here to get away from the Johnstones. She \_\_\_\_\_ Mrs Johnstone and tries to \_\_\_\_\_ her to move away but this time Mrs Johnstone \_\_\_\_\_. Mrs Lyons, desperate, \_\_\_\_\_ Mrs Johnstone with a \_\_\_\_\_ but Mrs Johnstone manages to overpower her. Here we see a \_\_\_\_\_ of power in their relationship. Mrs Lyons is becoming weaker, more \_\_\_\_\_ and mentally and \_\_\_\_\_ unstable, while Mrs Johnstone is more \_\_\_\_\_ and in \_\_\_\_\_.

*Trouble re-establish upset happier swearing fourteen confronts  
boarding school attacks embarrassed suspended Linda bus conductor  
seven angry refuses knife paranoid pay shift emotionally  
responsible control*

Autumn arrives and Mickey and Edward's lives begin to take \_\_\_\_\_ paths. While Edward is having fun at \_\_\_\_\_ Mickey is having to cope with the \_\_\_\_\_ of adult life. Linda falls \_\_\_\_\_ and Mickey \_\_\_\_\_ her but soon afterwards Mickey is made \_\_\_\_\_ due to the recession. At \_\_\_\_\_ Edward returns home expecting a \_\_\_\_\_ but Mickey is not in the mood. Mickey is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of Edward's life and he tells him to \_\_\_\_\_ "before I hit y". Upset, Edward asks Linda to \_\_\_\_\_ him, he doesn't know that she is already married. Desperate, Mickey decides to help \_\_\_\_\_ in a robbery but he is caught, arrested and \_\_\_\_\_ for 7 years.

*Party university Christmas marries responsibilities pregnant  
redundant economic marry beat it imprisoned jealous separate  
bitter Sammy*

When Mickey \_\_\_\_\_ from prison he is \_\_\_\_\_ to anti-depressants and is \_\_\_\_\_ to live with. An unhappy \_\_\_\_\_ seeks comfort in Edward's arms but \_\_\_\_\_ tells Mickey about the affair and he flies into a \_\_\_\_\_, grabs Sammy's \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Edward at the Town Hall. In a desperate attempt to stop \_\_\_\_\_, Mrs Johnstone tells him the \_\_\_\_\_ but rather than \_\_\_\_\_ things this deepens his \_\_\_\_\_, and as he waves the gun at Edward it \_\_\_\_\_ goes off and kills

Edward. The police marksmen then \_\_\_\_\_ Mickey and  
the play ends with Mrs Johnstone \_\_\_\_\_ over her two  
dead sons.

*Truth Linda Mickey difficult gun addicted rage emerges confronts  
anger accidentally shoot crying calming Mrs Lyons*



## Introduction to 'Blood Brothers'

### 'Blood Brothers' was written by Willy Russell

Take a look at p.12 for more on Willy Russell and his plays.

- 1) *Blood Brothers* was written in **Britain** in the **1980s**, but it's set in the period between the **1950s** and the **1970s**.
- 2) It's a **musical play** written by Willy Russell, a British playwright. Russell originally wrote *Blood Brothers* as a **straight play**, but he later **adapted** it into a musical, adding **songs** and **lyrics**.
- 3) *Blood Brothers* includes elements of **tragedy** — it has **serious** themes, an **unhappy** ending and one of its main characters experiences a **downfall**.
- 4) However, there are also **light-hearted** and **humorous** moments that provide **comic relief** for the audience.

### Blood Brothers on Stage

Directors need to think about the **key features** of *Blood Brothers* before they produce it on **stage**. Aspects like the play's 20th-century setting might influence how it is **performed** and **designed**.

### It's a play about social class and identity

*Blood Brothers* tells the story of **twin brothers** who were separated at birth and grew up in different **social classes**. The play's **themes** focus on how a person's life can be **influenced** by things **beyond their control**.

- 1) **Social Class** — The play shows that the **class** you are born into influences how you are **treated** and the **opportunities** you have.
- 2) **Identity** — Russell questions whether a person's **upbringing** or their **nature** (genetic make-up) is more important in deciding their **identity** and the path their life follows.
- 3) **Gender** — The story highlights the **impact** of **society's expectations** about **gender** on the lives of men and women.
- 4) **Childhood and Growing Up** — **Childhood** is portrayed as **easy** and **carefree**, but life is shown to be **more difficult** in **adulthood**.
- 5) **Fate** — Russell explores the idea that people's lives are **controlled** by **fate**, and that they're **unable** to **escape** it.

**Directors** should consider the **themes** that they want to emphasise when making their **production decisions**. For example, the Narrator might remain on stage at all times and **watch over** the other characters to reinforce that the twins **can't avoid** their **fate**.

### The play reflected British society at the time

- 1) The play's characters are **fictional**, but Russell uses them to **comment** on **real social issues** that existed in British society in the **1980s** when the play was first performed:

- There was a strong **class divide** in 1980s Britain. Middle-class people had more **opportunities** than working-class people. This was reflected in things like **education**, **job prospects** and **wealth**.
- Britain also had a serious **unemployment** problem in the 1980s. Many working-class people like Mickey lost their jobs when the government **closed** traditional **industries** (see p.6).



- 2) Russell aims to show that the **differences** caused by social class are **unfair** and that these **inequalities** created many of the **social problems** that existed in 1980s Britain. This **message** challenges the view held by the **government** at the time (see p.6), which claimed that **anyone** could be **successful** as long as they **worked hard**.

By exploring issues that were familiar to his audience, Russell encourages people to apply the message of the play to their own lives.



## Introduction to 'Blood Brothers'

### 'Blood Brothers' still appeals to audiences today

1) Although *Blood Brothers* is set over 40 years ago, many of the **issues** it explores are still **relevant** today:

- Russell's **message** that **social class** can be **restrictive** applies today — class division is now less rigid, but **class** continues to influence the **opportunities** that are available to people.
- The play explores **social issues** that **exist** in today's society. For example, **unemployment** is still a problem, and many people still face **prejudice** because of their **gender**.
- Some of the **themes** in the play are **universal** — *Blood Brothers* explores ideas about **identity** and the inevitable nature of **fate** that are recognisable in any era.

#### Effect on the Audience

*Blood Brothers* deals with issues that are **recognisable** to the audience, so it's easier for them to **relate** to the characters and **sympathise** with them. This helps the audience to **engage** with the play's **message**.

- 2) The **dramatic features** of *Blood Brothers* make it **entertaining**. The **storyline** is **dark** and **tragic**, but there are also moments of **comedy** — this makes the play **exciting** to watch, as the audience don't know what might happen next.
- 3) The plot is **fast paced**, which keeps the audience **engaged** — the events of more than **twenty years** are played out on stage in the space of **two acts**.
- 4) The play's **songs** are **entertaining** and **emotional**. They bring the story to **life** for the audience and make watching the play a more **memorable** experience.

See Section Two for more on the play's dramatic features and the techniques that Russell uses.

### 'Blood Brothers' has been performed many times

- 1) The **musical version** of *Blood Brothers* was first performed in **1983** at the **Liverpool Playhouse**.
- 2) It was immediately **popular** in Liverpool and was soon transferred to the **Lyric Theatre** in London's **West End**.
- 3) *Blood Brothers* has been performed **all over the UK** — there have been several **national tours** of the play since it opened.
- 4) After its initial run in 1983, *Blood Brothers* went on to become one of the **longest-running** musicals ever performed in the West End — it ran continuously from **1988** until **2012**.
- 5) The play is **still popular** today — a special **anniversary tour** of *Blood Brothers* opened in 2017 and was **extended** for 2018.



The Johnstones sing 'Bright New Day' in the original West End production of the play in London in 1983.

#### *Blood Brothers* has also had international success

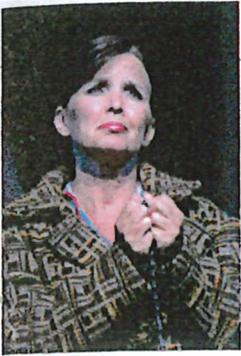
- The play has been performed in **several countries** including Australia, Japan, Canada and the USA — its **universal themes** make it appealing to audiences **all over the world**.
- It's even been **translated** into another **language**. In 1993, the play was performed in **Czech-Slovak** in Slovakia.
- In 2013, an **adaptation** of the play was performed in **South Africa**. The original play was **altered** to reflect **issues** that were relevant to South African **society**.

You won't need to write about adaptations in your exam, but it's useful to see how directors have presented the play in different ways depending on the identity and experiences of their audience.



# Who's Who in 'Blood Brothers'

© Nils Jorgensen/REX  
Shutterstock



## Mrs Johnstone...

... is Mickey, Edward and Sammy's mother. She gives Edward up so he'll have a better life.

## Mrs Lyons...

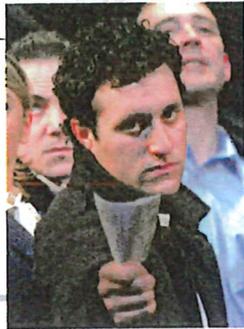
... is a middle-class woman who longs for a child. She manipulates Mrs Johnstone into giving Edward to her.



© Donald Cooper/photostage

## Mickey Johnstone...

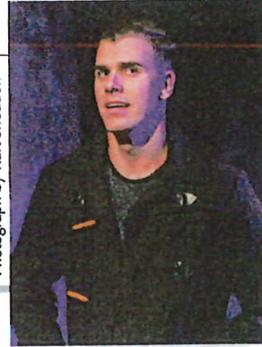
... is the twin Mrs Johnstone keeps. He's a friendly child but ends up unemployed and in trouble with the law.



© Nils Jorgensen/REX/Shutterstock

## Edward Lyons...

... is the twin Mrs Lyons takes. He's well-educated and grows up to be a successful local councillor.



© Produced by Enda Markey /  
Photograph by Kurt Sneedon

## Linda...

... is Mickey and Edward's friend. Both boys fall in love with her, and she marries Mickey.



© Nils Jorgensen/REX  
Shutterstock

## Sammy Johnstone...

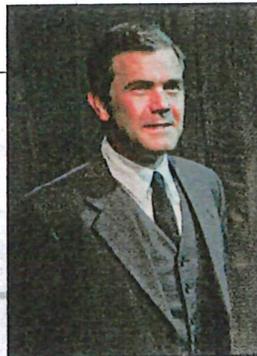
... is Mickey's older brother. He's always in trouble as a child and ends up as a criminal.



© Donald Cooper/photostage

## Mr Lyons...

... is a wealthy businessman who spends more time at work than with his family.



© Produced by Enda Markey /  
Photograph by Kurt Sneedon

## Chorus Members...

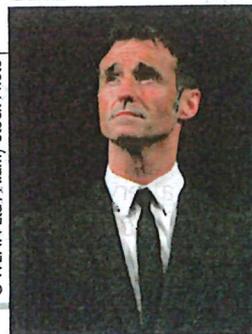
... sing parts of the story and play some minor characters, such as the 'Dole-ites'.



© Donald Cooper/photostage

## The Narrator...

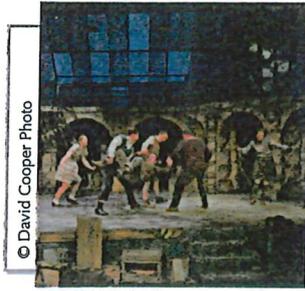
... helps to tell the story. He also plays several minor characters throughout the play.



© WENN Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo



## Plot Summary



© David Cooper Photo

### 'Blood Brothers'... what happens when?

Here's a little recap of the main events of *Blood Brothers*. It's a good idea to learn what happens when, so you can consider how elements of performance and design might change as the plot progresses.

### Act One — The twins are born and separated

- The Narrator introduces the twins and gives an **overview** of the story. We see a **preview** of the play's final moments — Mickey and Edward **both die**.
- Mrs Johnstone sings about how her husband left her with **seven children** and she **can't afford** to feed them.

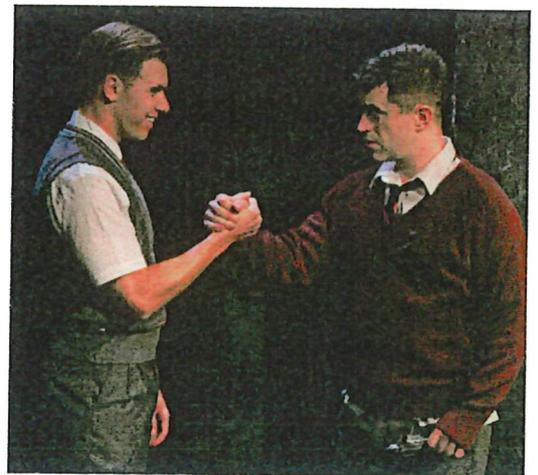


© David Cooper Photo

- Mrs Johnstone goes to clean at Mrs Lyons's house. Mrs Lyons reveals that she and her husband **can't have children**.
- Mrs Johnstone finds out she is **pregnant** with twins. Mrs Lyons **persuades** her to give her one of the babies.
- Mrs Johnstone gives birth. Debt collectors **repossess** her belongings. Mrs Lyons **takes** one of the babies.
- Mrs Lyons **fires** Mrs Johnstone, and tells her that both boys will **die** if they ever find out they are twins.

### Act One — The boys meet, aged seven, and are separated again

- Mickey and Edward **meet** near Mickey's house. They **bond immediately**.
- Mrs Johnstone is **horrified** when she realises who Mickey's new friend is. She tells Edward to **leave** and not to come back.
- Mickey goes to see Edward but Mrs Lyons sends him away. Edward is **angry** and uses **swear words** he learnt from Mickey. Mrs Lyons **hits** him.
- Edward **sneaks out** to play with Mickey and Linda.
- Mrs Lyons tells her husband that they need to **move away**, but he's **unconvinced**. Soon afterwards, a policeman catches Mickey, Edward and Linda **misbehaving**, which persuades Mr Lyons to move his family.
- Edward goes to Mrs Johnstone's house **upset** about moving. She gives him a **locket** with a picture of her and Mickey in it.
- The Johnstones find out that they're being moved to **Skelmersdale**.

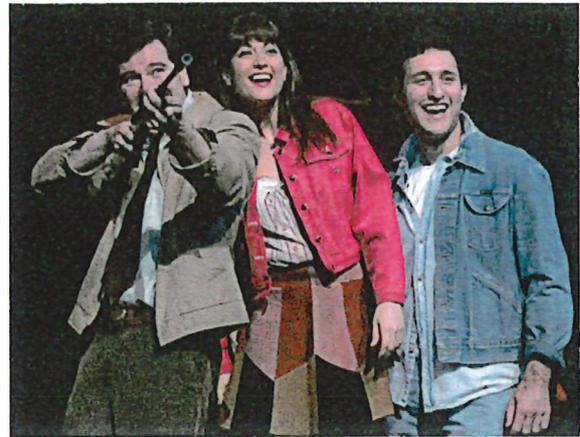




## Plot Summary

### Act Two — The boys meet again as teenagers

- The Johnstones are happier in Skelmersdale.
- Edward is suspended from his boarding school. Mickey and Linda are suspended from their comprehensive school.
- Back home, Mickey and Edward meet and recognise each other. They renew their friendship.
- Mrs Lyons sees the boys together. She tries to bribe Mrs Johnstone to move away. When she refuses, Mrs Lyons tries to attack her with a knife.
- Mickey, Edward and Linda meet up and the play moves through scenes in which they age from 14 to 18.
- Edward reveals he loves Linda, but then encourages Mickey to ask her out. Edward leaves for university.
- Mickey and Linda get married because Linda is pregnant. Mickey loses his job and has to go on the dole. Edward comes home from university. Mickey resents him and they fall out.
- Edward proposes to Linda. She admits she has feelings for him, but tells him she's married to Mickey.
- Sammy persuades Mickey to be a lookout during a robbery. It goes wrong and Sammy shoots the petrol station attendant. Mickey is sentenced to seven years in jail. He becomes depressed and is put on pills.



© Elliott Franks / ArenaPAL

### Act Two — The boys are now adults

- Mickey is released early but he is still depressed. Linda begs him to stop taking the pills.
- Linda gets them a new house and finds a job for Mickey. Mickey knows that Edward, who is now a local councillor, is responsible for both.
- Linda and Edward kiss. Meanwhile, Mickey stops taking his pills.
- Mrs Lyons shows Mickey that Edward and Linda are together.
- Mickey takes the gun Sammy used in the robbery and confronts Edward at the Town Hall.
- Mrs Johnstone tells the boys they are brothers. Mickey loses control and accidentally shoots Edward. The police shoot Mickey in response.



© Australian Production 2015 / Produced by Enda Mulvey / Photograph by Kurt Sneedon

### And you thought your family drama was bad...

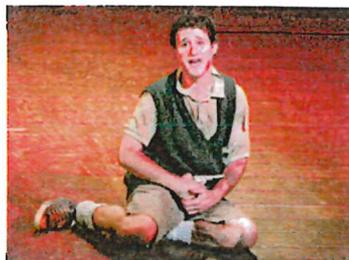
So... directors producing *Blood Brothers* have loads to consider. There's tragedy, comedy, more time jumps than you can shake a stick at and loads of social messages (not to mention all that singing and dancing). With so much going on, it's important you know the plot really well. Check out the cartoon at the back of this book if you're still not sure.



# Costume

## Costumes can reveal basic information about a character...

- 1) Costumes can highlight a character's age — for example, Mickey's clothes can help to convey that he ages from a child to an adult. In Act One, he might wear shorts to emphasise his youth. At the start of Act Two, he might wear full-length trousers to show that he is older, or jeans to show that he has become more interested in fashion as a teenager.
- 2) Characters' occupations can be shown through their costumes. Mrs Johnstone might wear an apron to show that she works as a cleaner, while Miss Jones might wear a smart blouse and skirt to convey that she works as a receptionist in an office.
- 3) Costume can also show a character's status — at the end of the play, Edward could wear a formal suit and tie to emphasise he is a politician. Mrs Lyons might wear expensive jewellery to highlight that she is wealthy and middle class.



© Donald Cooper/photostage

In this production, Mickey wears shorts and trainers to make him look more like a child.

### Hair and Make-up

The stage directions say that Mrs Johnstone "is aged thirty but looks more like fifty". A costume designer could make an actor look older by using hair chalk to add streaks of grey in her hair and a dark powder or eyeliner to add lines to her face. This would encourage the audience to feel sympathy for Mrs Johnstone — it would highlight the difficult life she has led and the strain she is under.

## ... and show aspects of their personality

- 1) A costume designer might dress Mrs Lyons in a formal silk blouse and smart pencil skirt, and her hair might be styled neatly. This would suggest that she cares about her appearance and how others see her.
- 2) In Act One, Mickey might have messy hair and be covered in dirt to show that he enjoys playing outside. In contrast, Edward might have neat hair and clean clothes to show he is less adventurous than Mickey.
- 3) Sammy might be dressed in dark colours throughout the play to reflect his menacing and rebellious nature.
- 4) Mr Lyons might be dressed in a business suit, even when he is at home with his family. This would convey to the audience that he is preoccupied with work.

Colour can be used symbolically to convey meaning to the audience (see p.51). For example, black can be associated with mystery and power.

## Costumes can have a symbolic meaning

- 1) Designers can use aspects of costume to symbolise something about a character for the audience.
- 2) At the end of Act Two, Mrs Johnstone could be wearing a long, black coat over her dress that falls below her knees. When the twins die, she could draw the coat around her body to cover the rest of her costume. This would symbolise her grief and the impact that her sons' deaths have had on her.
- 3) In Act Two, Mickey is dressed in "working clothes" at his wedding. A designer could dress Mickey in factory overalls throughout the rest of the act to symbolise that he can't break free from his working-class identity.
- 4) In a non-naturalistic production, the twins could be dressed in white T-shirts throughout the play. These shirts could each have a jagged hole the size of a bullet surrounded by a dark red stain to symbolise Mickey and Edward's inability to escape their violent deaths.

### Effect on the Audience

This would make the scenes where the twins are children more emotional for the audience to watch, as it would remind them that the twins' happiness and innocence won't last.



# Costume

## Costume can be used to support the play's action

A director can use costume to help make the action on stage **clearer** for the audience:

- In Act Two, Sammy is seen “pulling on a jacket” as he **leaves the house**. This helps to reinforce that he is going **outside** as the scene **moves** from the Johnstones’ **house** to the bus stop in the **street**.
- At the wedding, Mrs Johnstone “whips off her overalls and a wedding suit is underneath”. This shows the **quick scene transition** from Mrs Johnstone’s **house** to Mickey and Linda’s **wedding**.
- When Edward goes missing in Act One, Mrs Lyons’s **hair and make-up** could highlight her **distress**. She could have **smudged mascara** around her eyes as though she’s been **crying**, and her hair could also be **messy and tangled** to suggest that she has been running her hands through it in **despair**.

## Changes in costume can reflect a change in character

- 1) In Act One, Mrs Johnstone might wear her hair in a **messy bun** to suggest that she is too **tired** and **stressed** to think about her appearance. At the start of Act Two, she is **happier** and has **fewer responsibilities** because most of her children have “flown the nest”. Her **hairstyle** might **change** to reflect this — she could wear her hair **loose** and **flowing** to make her seem **carefree**.
- 2) Linda is **cheerful** as a teenager but grows more **tired** and **strained** after she becomes a wife and mother:

- She might wear a **short skirt** and **bright colours** at the beginning of Act Two to show that she is **young** and **enjoying** her life. As she gets older, her costume might change to show that she is **unhappy** — for example, she might **cover** her bright clothes with a **grey jumper**.
- When Linda has an affair with Edward, she feels **free** from her unhappy life with Mickey. This could also be reflected in her costume — she might wear a **dress** made from a **light, flowing** material.



© David Cooper Photo

In this production, Linda puts a baggy cardigan over the floral dress she wore as a teenager.

## In the exam, think about what costume can tell the audience

When you're writing about costume in the exam, it's important to include lots of **details** about how the costume would **look**. Here's an example of how you might do it:

In Act Two, I would dress Mickey in a school uniform of a white shirt, black polyester trousers and a tie to show that he is a pupil at a comprehensive school in the 1970s. The tie could be worn loosely fastened and at a short length, and his hair would be ruffled and messy. This would illustrate his rebellious personality and suggest to the audience that he doesn't take education seriously.

This gives **details** about **how** the costume would be **worn**.

This explains the **choice** of costume.

This explains the **effect** on the **audience**.



### I tried to thread a costume joke together but didn't get far...

Clothing is an important part of costume design, but it isn't the only aspect — in the exam, make sure you think about hair and make-up as well and how you would use them to achieve the effect that you want.

