

## AQA Sample Answer — Performance

upset Mickey is. I would raise my eyebrows when Mickey says "I bleedin' hated that job" to show Edward's surprise at the harshness of what Mickey is saying. I would pause in between "Why... why" and ask the question slowly. This would reinforce that Edward is confused by what Mickey has said and is still processing the information.

Use short quotes to make it clear to the examiner which part of the extract you're referring to.

Make a range of points about vocal and physical skills.

In this extract, Edward has an idealised view of unemployment. I would use his reaction to Mickey's confession to emphasise this. I would use a light and upbeat tone when Edward says "If I couldn't get a job I'd ... tilt my hat to the world" and accompany this with an over-the-top gesture where I would mime tilting a hat. This would show that Edward is trying to be funny, which would highlight that he still hasn't fully grasped the seriousness of their conversation. This portrayal would make Edward seem flippant and show that he doesn't understand the realities of living in poverty, which would reflect that middle-class people like Edward weren't as badly affected as working-class people like Mickey during the recession in the 1970s.

This shows that you've considered the play's context.

In this extract, Edward tries to solve Mickey's problems by giving him money because he doesn't fully understand Mickey's situation. The stage directions say that Edward tries to "throw some notes" to Mickey. I would eagerly reach into my pockets when I say "Look, look, money" and pull out the notes to show that Edward is keen to give Mickey money and expects him to accept it. Elsewhere in the play, I would have used a casual tone and body language when he gives him sweets in Act One and offers to get him cigarettes earlier in Act Two to show that Edward is happy to be generous towards Mickey. In this extract, I would use the same casual behaviour to show that he doesn't think that giving money is any different from giving sweets or cigarettes. I would recoil in shock when Mickey throws the notes on the floor. This body language would show that Edward wasn't expecting Mickey's reaction. I would pick the notes up quickly and clumsily to show that Edward is flustered, emphasising his confusion to the audience.

Explain how your choices are either similar or different to the rest of the play.

This shows good awareness of the play as a whole.

Always explain the effect of your performance decisions.

At the end of the extract, I would want to reveal Edward's desire for the simplicity of childhood friendship. I would put stress on the words "blood brothers" to highlight this meaningful phrase for the audience, and I would use a respectful tone to show Edward places a lot of value on their childhood pact. As I say that line, I would step towards Mickey. This close proximity would signal Edward's desire for friendship. I would use a defensive tone for "I'm exactly the same age as you", speaking quickly and loudly and placing emphasis on "you". This would make it sound like a childish retort to Mickey's "you still are a kid", showing the audience that he isn't as mature as Mickey. Edward realises that their relationship has changed, but he still doesn't understand why. Before he leaves, he "looks at Mickey". I would stare at him with a hard facial expression that slowly softens into a hurt one before breaking eye contact to convey feelings of defeat and hurt.

You can quote stage directions, but you should add your own ideas to them.

This considers the impact of the portrayal on the audience.



### I can't go to the theatre — I get terrible stage fright...

You'll need to explain your answers in more detail in these longer questions, but all your points should be relevant to the question. Don't get off track and start raving about how the Milkman's the best character...



## AQA Sample Answer — Design

This shows good awareness of the play as a whole.

teacher says there is "Talk of Oxbridge" in Edward's future, so I would use the official colours of Oxford University's Corpus Christi college for the scarf. This would signify that he is a member of an elite group who have access to a good education.

I would use the rest of Edward's clothing to reinforce his wealth and middle-class status. The stage directions state that he is wearing a "duffel coat", so I would choose a tan-coloured coat with a hood and toggles to reflect 1970s fashions.

The coat would be made from an expensive material like wool to suggest that it is high quality, and it would be in good condition to show that it is new. I would dress him in well-fitting, tailored trousers to suggest that he has had them specially made. This would show the audience that Edward can afford to buy expensive new clothes.

The stage directions state that Edward "tries to throw some notes" to Mickey, so his coat would need to have pockets to store the "notes". I would sew additional pockets onto the inside of the coat so he could pull money from several places, and I would make sure that the pockets were easy to access so they wouldn't hinder the actor's performance. For his shoes, I would choose a pair of polished brogues to add to his well-dressed appearance and make him look formal.

The answer looks at how design supports the action of the extract.

This shows that you've considered the play's context.

This shows that the answer considers the whole extract.

In this extract, Mickey has been made redundant and is struggling to find work, but he's still wearing the "working clothes" that he wore during 'Miss Jones' before the start of the extract. Mickey worked in a box factory, so I would dress him in a dark blue, polyester boiler suit to reflect the uniform that a factory worker might have worn in the 1970s. I would spray the boiler suit with a mixture of bleach and water to fade the material to make it look worn. This would suggest that it was already old when Mickey got it, showing that, unlike Edward, he can't afford new clothes. For Mickey's shoes, I would choose steel-capped boots to reflect 1970s work shoes. I would distress the leather on the boots using a brush with metal bristles to make the boots look scuffed, showing that they are in poor condition.

The contrast between these shoes and Edward's smart brogues would be an effective representation of the class divide for the audience and enhance the impact of Mickey's words when he says "But I'm not in your shoes, I'm in these".

I would ruffle up Mickey's hair to make him look unkempt and suggest that he is too stressed to care about his appearance. In contrast, Edward's hair would be combed into a neat side-parting to emphasise that he has time to take care of himself and is not stressed like Mickey. I would also use make-up to make Mickey look tired. I would apply white face powder to make him look pale and use a darker powder under his eyes to suggest he hasn't been sleeping well. This would show the impact that searching for jobs has had on him and would also make him look older than Edward. This would reinforce the effect of Mickey's words for the audience when he says that Edward is "still a kid" whereas he "grew up".

This provides specific detail about the techniques that you'd use.

This shows good knowledge of the rest of the play.

This considers the impact of the portrayal on the audience.

Explain the reasons behind your design choices.

You can use quotes from the play to explain the effect of your ideas

### There are no mistakes in my plays — it's all by design...

For the 20-mark design question, it's important to give lots of detail when explaining your ideas, so be specific about the design choices you'd make, and describe what you'd do to achieve the right effect.





## Interpretation of character

You will need to show how you can interpret a character. This means that you understand the character's motivations and goals, and the obstacles they face. Then you must be able to use your vocal and physical skills to portray the character and create particular effects for the audience, such as tension, comedy, surprise, pity or sorrow.

Look below at one interpretation of the character of **Linda** as a 14-year-old in the second act, in the scene in the field with Mickey (your interpretation may differ).

### FACTS:

**Background:** a working-class 14-year-old

**Job:** student, attending a secondary modern

### Interpretation:

#### PHYSICAL APPEARANCE:

I imagine Linda to be active and attractive.

#### HAIR:

Freshly washed hair, tied up in a high ponytail.

#### BODY LANGUAGE:

She is physically confident. She pretends she is helpless in the field scene, but it is an act. She stands her ground and can stick up for herself. She looks for any excuse to touch and flirt with Mickey.

#### MAKE-UP:

Emphasises her fresh-faced youth. 1970s make-up often used pink tones with shiny cheeks, aiming for a healthy, natural look. Peach- or berry-coloured lip gloss. Eyeliner, cream eye shadow and mascara, perhaps applied heavily as make-up is a new skill for her.

#### VOICE:

Speaks with a working-class Liverpool accent. She speaks loudly as doesn't care who hears her. She sometimes teases Mickey, so has a playful tone and laughs a lot.

#### COSTUME:

School uniform (white blouse, grey skirt) which she has adjusted to fit her sense of fashion. She has rolled the waistband over to make her skirt very short. Mini-skirts were popular at this time, so she would be imitating people she'd seen in magazines, and would be turning her knee-length skirt into a mini. Her green school tie is knotted and shortened as an act of rebellion. She takes off her grey school jumper and ties it around her waist when trudging up the hill. She is wearing non-school regulation high heels with flesh-coloured tights.

#### EFFECT ON AUDIENCE:

The audience should see a startling transformation from the tomboyish seven-year-old to this attractive, confident teenager. She is beginning to be aware of her effect on boys, but is still outspoken and protective of Mickey as she was when they were children.





## TASK 8

Using your own understanding of the characters in the play, write an interpretation of Edward, Mickey, Mrs Lyons, Mrs Johnstone or the Narrator, using the following headings:

- ▶ Age
- ▶ Job/Education
- ▶ Physical appearance
- ▶ Voice
- ▶ Body language
- ▶ Costume
- ▶ Hair
- ▶ Make-up.

In this instance, think about total characterisation, which includes facts about the characters and their appearance as well as how they could be interpreted through acting, costume and make-up choices. This will help you to think about all aspects of interpreting the character, even when writing about acting or design.

SET PLAY 2:  
*Blood Brothers*  
by Willy Russell

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## Performing choices

In Question 2, you will be asked to discuss in detail how you would perform a particular line as a given character. For example:

You are performing the role of Mrs Lyons.

Describe how you would use your vocal and physical skills to perform the line below and explain the effects you want to create.

**Mrs Lyons (Act 1):** 'Do you go to the same school as Edward?'

In this scene, Mickey has turned up unexpectedly at the Lyons house and Mrs Lyons is immediately suspicious of him. I want to establish that Mrs Lyons is not welcoming to Mickey and wants to discover who he is. 1 Playing Mrs Lyons, I would hold myself very stiffly and formally, making no gestures of welcome to Mickey. 2 I would look down at him and examine him, noting that his clothing and accent are not what I would expect of Edward's friends. 3 I don't have a strong Liverpool accent; instead I speak **received pronunciation**, which indicates my background and education. My voice is well-modulated, not rude, but I would use a slightly cold tone. 4 I would emphasise the word 'you' as there is a sense of disbelief that Mickey could go to the same school as Edward. 5 I would say Edward's name warmly and protectively, as I think of him as my boy. I would speak slowly and clearly, determined to get an answer. 6 At the end of the line, I would look between the boys, beginning to realise who Mickey is. 7 I would then move closer to Edward, blocking Mickey from him, my facial expression beginning to show my alarm. 8

## KEY TERM:

**Received pronunciation (RP):** a way of speaking which is considered the 'standard' form of English pronunciation. It is not specific to a certain location, but, instead, is associated with education and formal speaking.

Effect

Physical skills

Vocal skills

Vocal skills

Physical skills and effect

Physical skills and effect

Physical skills

Vocal skills and effect



## Costume, hair and make-up design inspired by context

In the beginning of Act 2, the teenage Sammy is 16 and getting into trouble with the police. Although he didn't have much money, like many young men at this time, Sammy's fashion choices were influenced by rock bands, such as the Bay City Rollers, and other well-known figures, such as the footballer George Best. In some working-class communities there was a revival of Teddy Boy clothing, with exaggerated 1950s big jackets, rolled jeans and heavy shoes or boots.

As a designer, how would you costume **Sammy** for the scene in Act 2 when he gets into trouble with the bus conductor? Consider:

- ▶ how the costume will reflect his personality
- ▶ how the costume will reflect the play's context.

SET PLAY 2:  
*Blood Brothers*  
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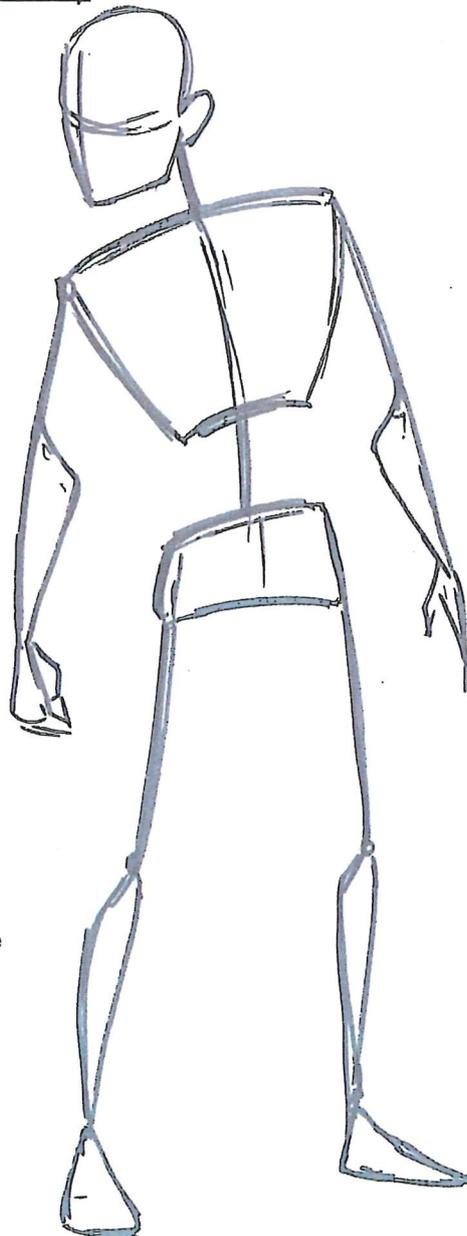
TIP

It is important to explain why you have made your design choices. For example, have you chosen bright colours to suggest he has an outgoing personality, or chosen heavy boots, which might make him seem more dangerous or threatening? Does he take care with his appearance or model himself on people he admires?

### Teenage Sammy

**Hairstyle:** Short?  
Long? Styled?

**Make-up:**  
Clean-shaven or  
stubble? Clear  
complexion or spots?



Headwear? Hat? Cap?

**Jacket:** Leather?  
Cotton? Polyester?  
**Fit:** Loose? Fitted?  
**Shape:** Long? Short?

**Shirt:** Plain or  
patterned? Tucked  
in or left out? Long  
sleeves or short  
sleeves?

**Accessories:** Watch?  
Bandana? Belt?  
Other?

**Trousers:** Jeans?  
Chinos? Suit?  
Corduroy?  
**Fit:** Loose or tight?  
Short or long? Rolled  
or not?  
**Condition:** Worn or  
new? Patched?

**Footwear:** Trainers?  
Boots? Loafers?  
**Materials:** Suede?  
Leather? Cloth?

### TASK 3

Now create a costume design for Mrs Johnstone. Think about how the costume can be adapted for when she is working and when she is at home. Will there be costume pieces or accessories, which she adds or removes depending on what she is doing? Take into account her personality and lack of money, as well as the fashions of the time.



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## Writing about your design ideas

Question 1 will ask you to consider an aspect of design for the play in relation to its context. Below is a student's plan for the following question:

SET PLAY 2:  
*Blood Brothers*  
by Willy Russell

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### TIP

It is important to know that there are many other interpretations of how Mrs Johnstone might be costumed.



You are designing a costume for Mrs Johnstone in a performance of this extract (from 'Hello, Mrs Johnstone' to 'O, I see ...' from the first act). The costume must reflect the context of *Blood Brothers*, set in a working-class Liverpool community in the late 1960s. Describe your design ideas for the costume.

#### 1 Understanding of the character in the play:

Mrs Johnstone is a working-class, single mother who works as a cleaner to support her family.

#### 2 Period:

Colours and fabrics: 1960s bright prints, inexpensive fabrics, such as polyester and cotton. Knee-length dress as appropriate for the late 1960s.

#### 3 Occupation/role:

She would wear an apron or tabard to protect her clothes. She is a cleaner, so clothes need to be practical and hard-wearing. Her hair would be pulled back so it doesn't get in her way. Her shoes are well-worn flats, which need to be replaced, but she can't afford to yet.

#### 4 Character shown through costume:

She is naturally cheerful and tries to make the best of bad situations, so, even though she doesn't have much money, her dress, though worn, would be neat. The dress might be brighter than the drab tabard over it. She has put on weight since having children, so the fit of her clothes would be shapeless to suggest this. Her simple clothes should contrast with Mrs Lyons' more expensive outfits.



### TIP

It is important that you justify your ideas. Explain why you are making these specific choices; don't just describe what they will look like. What do we learn about the Narrator's role in the play and what effect do you want them to have?

- ▶ Understanding of the character in the play
- ▶ Period
- ▶ Occupation/role
- ▶ Character shown through costume.

## TASK 5

Using the above plan as a guide, create your own plan for the character of the Narrator in answer to the following question:

You are designing a costume for the Narrator to wear in a performance of this extract from the first act (from the opening 'So did y'hear the story of the Johnstone twins?' to 'How she came to play this part'). The costume must reflect the context of *Blood Brothers*, set in a Liverpool community in the late 1960s. Describe your design ideas for the costume.





# WILLY RUSSELL'S BLOOD BROTHERS

## ***Blood Brothers* background information**

***"You've never seen a musical like *Blood Brothers*. Every night of the week audiences stand and cheer. See it for yourself and you will understand why."***

New York Times

*Blood Brothers* premièred at the Liverpool Playhouse in January 1983, and continues its hugely successful West End run today. It continues to receive standing ovations night after night.

Willy Russell's tale of two brothers considers class, fate and destiny, childhood and adolescence, surrogacy, superstition, humour and tragedy.

For students studying *Blood Brothers* for either English or drama, it is essential to acknowledge the fact that *Blood Brothers* was written as a musical for the stage. *Blood Brothers* is currently appearing both in London's West End and throughout the UK on a national tour and would provide a highly enjoyable and stimulating complement to any student's coursework, offering further familiarity with the text.

## **Willy Russell – Book, Lyrics and Music**

Willy Russell is undeniably one of the country's leading contemporary dramatists. His countless credits include *Educating Rita* and *Shirley Valentine*. *Educating Rita*, originally commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, enjoyed a two-year run in the West End and was made into a film starring Michael Caine and Julie Walters. *Shirley Valentine* also made the move from stage to screen in the enormously popular film starring Pauline Collins and Tom Conti.

*Blood Brothers* is directed by Bob Tomson and Bill Kenwright with designs by Andy Walmsley. Nick Richings is the lighting designer and Rod Edwards the production musical director.



# WILLY RUSSELL'S BLOOD BROTHERS

The knowledge that the two have become playmates devastates the neurotic Mrs Lyons, who has provided for Eddie and nurtured him into a well-bred, middle-class boy. However, despite wanting the best for her son, she recoils at the idea of his interaction with other children – particularly the boy she knows to be Eddie's twin.

In a desperate attempt to keep Eddie to herself, Mrs Lyons persuades her husband to move the family away from the city. Humouring his wife, Mr Lyons concedes in the hope that his wife will return to her old self with a change of scene.

Eddie leaves with much reluctance, and a sad farewell to Mickey. Mrs Johnstone again puts on a brave face as she says goodbye to her son for the second time. We witness real tenderness between Eddie and Mrs Johnstone and this moment appears to show a more affectionate bond between Eddie and Mrs Johnstone than we have witnessed between Eddie and Mrs Lyons.

Soon after Eddie's departure, Mrs Johnstone receives news of a more optimistic nature. Her family are being relocated to a new housing estate out of town and this provides new hope of starting again for the Johnstones.

In the second half of the performance, we are reintroduced to the twins, who have become teenagers since we last saw them. Mickey is a typical teenage lad, keen on self-image and not really sure how to handle his feeling towards girls. Eddie has predictably turned into the young gentleman, excelling at school and the very model of a polite young man. However, when the two reunite after so many years, we see the exterior personalities fall away. Mickey is no longer concerned with whether he looks and sounds 'cool', and Eddie forgets his 'Serious Young Sir' persona in the excitement. The pair are immediately at home with each other once again.

The pair become inseparable – just as they were before – along with childhood friend Linda. Eddie gets into trouble at school for wearing the locket that Mrs Johnstone gave him upon their parting years ago, and surprises his teachers and mother by defying them and continuing to wear the locket.

After this incident, Mrs Lyons confronts Mrs Johnstone and accuses her of ruining her. In this scene we see Mrs Lyons losing complete control and revealing her possessive and obsessive nature in full. Here we feel great sympathy for Mrs Johnstone, and we realise that despite having very little money to offer her children, she is the more kind and reasonable of the two mothers.



# Key Issues and Themes Within the Text

- Studying characters and relationships within the text
- Childhood and adolescence, considering ideas of heredity, friendship, background education, identity, etc.
- Nature or Nurture? Is your identity formed by the way you are brought up, or does it run deeper?
- The social class system
- Surrogate parenthood
- Superstition
- The voice of the author and attitudes within the text
- Consider the importance of social, historical and cultural contexts – what events have built a foundation for the time and place of the text?
- Also consider the concept that Russell constructed the text to be performed as a piece of musical theatre

## Mickey and Eddie



For the reader/audience, the delight of watching Mickey and Eddie's friendship blossom is the knowledge that they are brothers,

the fact of which they are unaware. This sense of dramatic irony is a point of humour throughout the play, but also a reminder of the superstitious curse that Mrs Lyons has inflicted – and the foreknowledge of what is going to happen.

In the first half of the show, Mickey appears as a childhood ringleader, and a hero-figure for Eddie, who is in awe of Mickey's unrestrained energy. We watch as their natural bond unfolds, and as their inhibitions fall away, we notice that they appear more alike.

In contrast, we see Eddie becoming the role model towards the end of the show. We appreciate him more for his foundations – he holds a good job and is considerate of Linda when Mickey rebukes her. We see the brothers grow apart again, as Eddie prospers and Mickey faces imprisonment and falls into depression.

## The Role of the Narrator

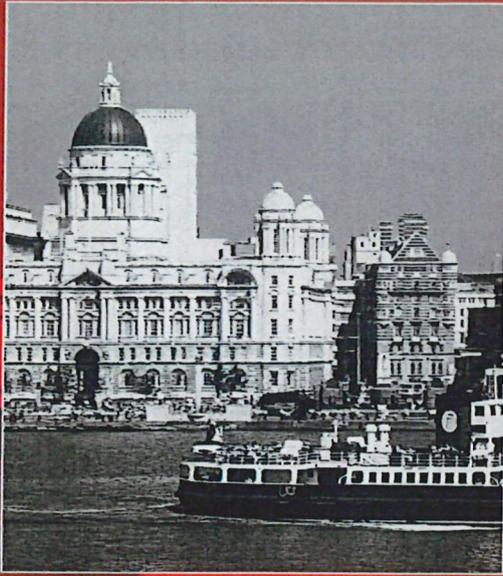
What purpose does the narrator serve? On stage he appears dressed in a black suit – this gives him a neutral status, as we cannot identify anything about his character. It gives him a sense of anonymity throughout the show, and the fact that the other characters do not acknowledge him gives him a ghost-like quality.



His main role throughout the show is to act as a constant reminder to us of the brothers' tragic fate – exemplified in the musical number 'Shoes Upon the Table', which is repeated throughout both acts of the show. It is also notable that

as the show commences with the scene of the finale, his attire is like that of somebody who is attending a funeral – and it seems that he is dressed for such an occasion throughout the entire play.





## Other Themes to Consider

Russell has intertwined many different themes and concepts to construct a piece of musical theatre that contains realism, emotion and a gripping plot.

## Social Class

We have already acknowledged the importance of social class throughout the text, within the study of characters and their relationships, identity, and the experience of social class throughout childhood and adolescence.

In *Blood Brothers*, we see social class as a conflict, mirroring the battle between the two mothers. We also see Mickey and Eddie overcoming the class boundaries to secure a bond of friendship and affection.

On stage there are several indications of the class separation that cannot be made as apparent in the text. For example, the use of costume immediately causes us to make an assumption about each character. Eddie appears with his clothes neatly pressed – Mickey appears as if he has just been 'dragged out of a hedge backwards'.

On the stage, the accents can also be brought to life, again reminding us of the conflict between the classes. Eddie and the Lyons are well-spoken, traditional of the middle and higher classes – suggesting a good education and elocution lessons. The Johnstone family share a broad Liverpudlian accent, suggesting the lack of a 'proper' education and implying a connotation of 'commonness'.



# Author and Structure

It is important to be constantly aware of the voice of the author. However, it is also important to remember that it is not just the attitudes of the author that we must take note of.

- We must acknowledge attitudes in the text – not necessarily those of the author, but a spectrum of attitudes represented by different characters.
- There are also our own attitudes to the text. It is important to be aware of how the text makes us feel and what our opinions are.
- And as has already been mentioned – we must listen to the voice behind the text – the voice of the author.

'Russell's undoubted achievement is to have brought to prominence the authentic voice of Liverpool, with its driest of dry wit, glimpses of pathos and indefatigable humanity.' Martin Cinnamond *'Atlantic City's Likely Lads'*

How does Russell create an awareness of social, historical and cultural contexts and influences in the text?

Russell uses the iconic status of Marilyn Monroe as a kind of timeline that parallels the rise and fall of events. At the beginning of the play, Mrs Johnstone is younger and as yet without an extensive family; she compares herself to the young rising star of Marilyn Monroe. Towards the end of the performance, Marilyn Monroe's demise reflects the sad change in events within the play.

The reference to Marilyn Monroe also suggests an era for the play – the late 1950s, early 1960s. This helps us to become familiar with the text and the play, as we already have a knowledge of the era. This means we can also gain an understanding of the stigma and boundaries that surrounded the social classes at that time.



SET  
DESIGN BY  
RUTH  
NEEMAN

# Blood Brother

2009

Written by Willy  
Russell

Directed by John  
Fogle

Lighting by Greg  
Mancusi-Ungaro

Marblehead Little  
Theatre



Twin brothers  
born to a  
working class  
mother in  
Liverpool in  
the 1980s are  
separated at  
birth. Their  
lives and fates  
are decided at  
that moment.

A single set is  
transformed  
by lighting to  
accommodate  
the different  
neighborhoods  
and spaces  
from  
childhood  
playgrounds to  
prison cell.

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PORTFOLIO



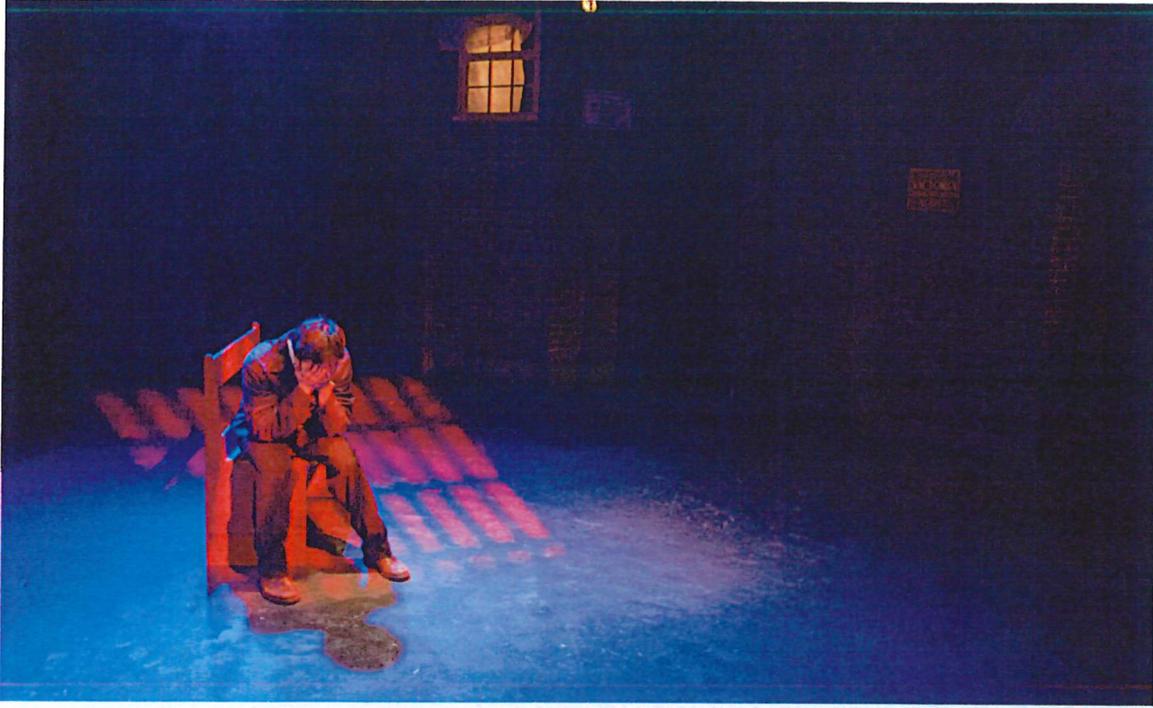
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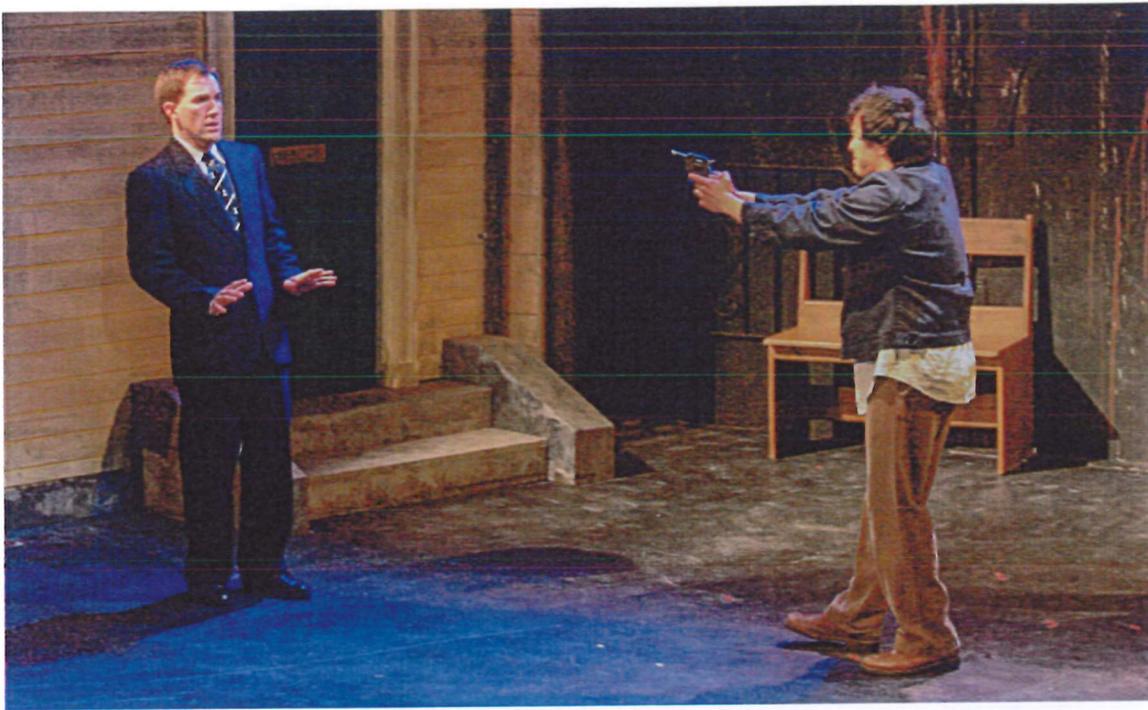
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PORTFOLIO



# PORTFOLIO



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