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Blood

Brothers

AQA GCSE English Literature



York Notes Rapid Revision

Blood Brothers

AQA GCSE English Literature

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INTRODUCTION Who is Willy Russell?

Three key things about the playwright, Willy Russell

1. Willy Russell comes from a **working-class** family.
2. He grew up in Whiston, just outside the city of **Liverpool**.
3. Willy Russell has written a number of **successful plays**. Most of them are based in and around Liverpool, feature working-class characters, and deal with the theme of **class divisions**.



What was his early life like?

- His father and mother were working class and his father had a number of jobs. He worked in mining, in a factory and in a fish and chip shop. His mother was a nurse and later worked in a warehouse.
- Russell left school at 15, without any formal qualifications, to work as a hairdresser.
- He returned to education four years later, attending evening classes, before training to be a teacher.

Why did he write *Blood Brothers*?

- Russell asks his audience to consider the disadvantages of being working class and the impact it has on a person's opportunities.
- He was passionate about supporting the Labour Party's values. He challenged the view of the Prime Minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher, that anyone can make money and be successful if they work hard enough.
- Willy Russell had an ambition to write a full musical, including the lyrics and music. He succeeded when he wrote *Blood Brothers*.

What was the response to *Blood Brothers*?

- *Blood Brothers* was first performed in Liverpool in 1983 and then in London's West End in 1988.
- The play ran in the West End for 24 years, closing in 2012. It was the third longest-running musical ever performed.
- *Blood Brothers* is still one of the best-selling British musicals, and its themes of class and nature over nurture are as relevant as ever.

INTRODUCTION Plot summary

Act One, Parts 1 and 2

- The play opens with Mickey and Edward's deaths. This is a flash forward to the end of the play.
- Mrs Johnstone is persuaded by Mrs Lyons to give her one of her twins.
- Mrs Lyons threatens Mrs Johnstone and then fires her.

Act One, Parts 3 and 4

- Time has moved forward; Mickey and Edward are now seven years old.
- Mickey and Edward meet and, when they discover they share the same birthday, become blood brothers by making a tiny cut on their hands and mingling their blood. This makes a pact between them to remain friends for life.
- Both families, unbeknown to each other, move from Liverpool to a new town in the country.

Act Two, Part 3

- Mickey and Linda get married and are having a baby.
- The boys fall out because Mickey has had to grow up too quickly and Edward has not.
- Mickey commits a crime with Sammy and goes to jail.
- Mickey becomes addicted to antidepressants.

Act Two, Parts 1 and 2

- Act Two starts seven years on from where Act One ended.
- We see the contrasting education and school experiences of Mickey and Edward. Edward attends a private school, while Mickey goes to a state secondary modern school.
- Mickey and Edward meet up again as young adults and rekindle their friendship.
- Mrs Lyons violently attacks Mrs Johnstone.

Act Two, Part 4

- Edward and Linda start an affair.
- Mrs Johnstone tells Edward and Mickey they are brothers.
- Mickey accidentally shoots Edward and is then shot by the police.

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act One, Part 1

Five key things about Act One, Part 1 (pages 5–15)

1. The **Narrator** summarises the plot, about the Johnstone twins who were separated at birth.
2. The play is a **cyclical narrative**; it opens with the twins' deaths.
3. **Mrs Johnstone** is a single mother with no money. She is pregnant with twins.
4. **Mrs Lyons** employs Mrs Johnstone as her cleaner. She persuades Mrs Johnstone to give her one of the twins when they are born.
5. The **themes** of **class** and **superstition** are introduced, revealing the difference between working-class and middle-class lifestyles in the 1950s and the effect of superstition on behaviour.



What happens at the start of the play?

- The play begins with a **flash forward** to the final moments of the play, when Mickey and Eddie die. The action then reverts to before they were born.
- The Narrator introduces Mrs Johnstone and invites the audience to '**judge for yourselves**' her situation.
- Mrs Johnstone's husband has left her pregnant and with seven children. She compares herself to the ill-fated film star Marilyn Monroe.
- She cannot pay the Milkman but says she has a new job and will have money soon. We see her on her way to a cleaning job at Mrs Lyons' house.

What happens when Mrs Johnstone starts working for Mrs Lyons?

- Mrs Lyons tells Mrs Johnstone that Mr Lyons works away and she finds their house too large. They are unable to have children of their own.
- Mrs Johnstone reacts to new shoes being put on a table and Mrs Lyons laughs at her superstitious nature.
- Mrs Johnstone worries how she'll cope with twins – '**the welfare**' has already suggested she put some of her children '**into care**'.
- Mrs Lyons persuades her to give her one of the twins and produces a Bible on which Mrs Johnstone makes her promise.

Five key quotations

1. Stage directions for Mrs Johnstone: *'She is aged thirty but looks more like fifty.'*
2. The **omniscient Narrator**: *'In the name of Jesus, the thing was done,/ Now there's no going back, for anyone.'*
3. The cyclical narrative structure – the Narrator: *'An' did you never hear how the Johnstones died,/ Never knowing they shared one name,/ Till the day they died'*
4. Regional context of Liverpool – Kid Three: *'Ey, Mother; I'm starvin' an' there's nothin' in.'*
5. Mrs Johnstone about the future of the baby she gives to Mrs Lyons: *'He could never be told/ To stand and queue up/ For hours on end at the dole'*

Note it!

Note how Mrs Lyons manipulates Mrs Johnstone into saying yes. She brings up Mrs Johnstone's confession about **'the welfare'** and gets her to swear on the Bible, knowing she's superstitious. Mrs Lyons' own vulnerability is revealed when she admits her desperation to have a child.

Exam focus

How can I write about structure? AO2

You can write about how the opening of the play shows us both the beginning and the end of the plot.

One function of the opening of the play is to frame the story to come. In the opening lines *'An' did you never hear how the Johnstones died'*, the Narrator reveals the end of the play and confirms his role as an omniscient perspective on the story. By starting with a re-enactment of the end of the play, Russell is establishing the typical conventions of a tragedy, confirming the future deaths of the main characters.

Topic sentence makes overall point

Appropriate and supportive quotation

Term related to structure

Explanation of the writer's choice

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about structure. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Russell introduces the theme of poverty early on when Mrs Johnstone assumes that her child would

My progress

Needs more work ☐

Getting there ☐

Sorted! ☐

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act One, Part 2

Five key things about Act One, Part 2 (pages 16-24)

1. The extent of Mrs Johnstone's **money problems** and poverty is revealed.
2. Mrs Johnstone's situation leaves her **no choice** but to give up one of her twins.
3. The themes of **money** and **power** are introduced through Mrs Lyons' treatment of Mrs Johnstone. She easily **manipulates** the poorer, working-class woman who has no one she can turn to for help.
4. We learn about the state of Mrs Lyons' declining **mental health** for the first time; Mr Lyons suggests she has changed since the arrival of Edward but explains it away as post-natal depression.
5. Russell further develops the **theme** of **superstition** and the idea that every action has a consequence, through the Narrator's words.

What happens to Mrs Johnstone?

- Mrs Johnstone returns from giving birth to the twins.
- Debt collectors are at Mrs Johnstone's house, emerging from her home with things she has bought but cannot afford.
- She reveals that buying things on credit is something she has done before and will do again.



What happens once Mrs Lyons has one of the twins?

- Mrs Johnstone seems to regret her promise just as Mrs Lyons turns up to take one of the babies. When Mrs Johnstone is hesitant, Mrs Lyons reminds her that she '**swore on the Bible**'.
- While Mrs Johnstone is cleaning the Lyons' house, she cannot help but go to Edward when he starts crying.
- Mrs Lyons fires Mrs Johnstone from her job, giving her money to try and silence her. She then invents the superstition: '**if either twin learns that he once was a pair; they shall both immediately die.**'

Five key quotations

1. Stage directions show Mrs Johnstone as an attentive mother: **'Making faces and noises at the babies she stops the crying.'**
2. Kid One and Mrs Johnstone, on the theme of poverty and credit: **'Will he have his own bike? / Yeh. With both wheels on.'**
3. The character of Mr Lyons – to Mrs Lyons: **'The house is your domain.'**
4. Mr Lyons on mental health: **'It's this depression thing that happens after a woman's had a...'**
5. Money and manipulation: **'She pushes the money into Mrs Johnstone's hands'** and **'You'll be locked up. You sold your baby.'**

Note it!

Note Mrs Lyons' first violent action is that she **'roughly drags'** Mrs Johnstone away from the cot. She goes on to hit Edward and attempts to stab Mrs Johnstone in Act Two.

Exam focus

How can I write about the power of money? AO1

You can write about how money is presented in the play.

We can see the juxtaposition between the availability of money in the two women's lives. Mrs Johnstone's poverty is further highlighted by the forceful removal of goods bought on credit and the description of heaven as somewhere you can have a bike with both wheels on. In contrast, Mrs Lyons can ask her husband and receive large sums of money. This allows Mrs Lyons to buy Mrs Johnstone's removal from her life and argue that she 'sold' her baby.

Topic sentence/point

Uses correct terminology

Explanation of the power of wealth over poverty

Quotation supports point

Further illustration of the power of wealth over poverty

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about Mr Lyons. Use one of the quotations from the list.

In Act One, Part 2, Russell reveals Mr Lyons' attitude towards women and home life when

My progress

Needs more work

Getting there

Sorted!

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act One, Part 3

Five key things about Act One, Part 3 (pages 24–37)

1. Time has moved forward. **Mickey** and **Edward** (Eddie) are now **seven years old**.
2. The character of **Sammy**, Mickey's older brother, is introduced.
3. Russell introduces **humour** to highlight the differences in their **social class** and **upbringing** to this point.
4. Mickey and Edward **become blood brothers** when they discover they share the same birthday.
5. Mrs Lyons and Mrs Johnstone **react badly** to seeing the **twins together**.



What happens when the boys meet?

- Mickey reveals his feelings about his brother Sammy. It is clear to the audience that he cares for him and admires him, even though Sammy's behaviour is not always appropriate.
- Mickey and Edward meet for the first time. Mickey speaks in a **Liverpudlian accent** and uses the local **dialect**. In comparison, Edward talks using **Standard English**. The contrast is a source of humour for the audience.
- Russell **foreshadows** future events when Sammy declares he is going to get a '**real gun**' and he carries out a '**fantasy shoot-out**' when playing.
- Mrs Johnstone discovers the two boys together and sends Edward home, threatening him with the '**bogey man**'.

What happens in the Lyons' home?

- Mr Lyons prioritises work over spending time with Edward, showing him to be a **stereotypical** father of the 1960s and early 1970s.
- Mickey calls at the Lyons' house to see Edward but Mrs Lyons recognises him and sends him away.
- Mrs Lyons forbids Edward from seeing Mickey. Edward is confused by Mrs Lyons' reasons and swears at her, using language he has just learnt from Mickey.
- Mrs Lyons reacts to this by hitting Edward '**hard and instinctively**', then instantly regrets it and is remorseful.

Five key quotations

1. Mickey's admiration for his older brother Sammy: **'I wish I was our Sammy.'**
2. Differences in the boys' class and upbringing, shown in their speech: **'Cos me mam says.'** (Mickey); **'Well, my mummy doesn't allow me to play down here actually.'** (Edward)
3. Mickey and Edward make a pact – Mickey: **'this means that we're blood brothers an' that we always have to stand by each other.'**
4. Mrs Johnstone's superstitious reaction to Edward being at her house with Mickey: **'Beat it, go home before the bogey man gets y'.'**
5. The theme of upbringing: **'like a horrible little boy, like them. But you are not like them. You are my son'** (Mrs Lyons)

Note it!

Seven-year-old Mickey and Edward are usually played by adult male actors. Notice how the language and stage directions encourage them to act in a child-like way.

Exam focus

How can I write about contrasts between characters? AO2

You can write about the contrasts drawn between the twins.

Russell contrasts the twins' upbringings through actions and language. While Mickey speaks in Liverpoolian dialect, using phrases like 'Me mam', Edward uses Standard English, saying 'My mummy'. This emphasises the difference in the boys' social class. Equally, Edward has lots of sweets that he's happy to share, encouraging Mickey to take 'as many as you want'. This contrasts the abundance of things that Edward has with Mickey, who has nothing. These early events also foreshadow Mickey's later reliance on Edward's generosity.

Topic sentence/point

Embedded quotation

Explanation of the quotation

Further embedded quotation, with explanation

Link to play as a whole

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about how Mrs Johnstone reacts to the boys' meeting. Use one of the quotations from the list.

The way that Mrs Johnstone reacts to the boys being together shows her superstition in

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act One, Part 4

Five key things about Act One, Part 4 (pages 37-58)

1. We meet **Linda**, a working-class girl who is the same age as Mickey and Edward.
2. The **theme** of **class prejudice** (or institutional prejudice) is introduced through the **contrasting behaviour of the Policeman** towards the **Johnstones** and the **Lyons**.
3. **Mrs Johnstone** gives **Edward** a **locket** containing a photo of her and Mickey as a baby.
4. The theme of **nature over nurture** is introduced through both **Edward's** behaviour towards the Policeman and his **superstitious nature**.
5. The plot takes a new turn as **both families**, unbeknown to each other, **move house to a new town** in the country.



What happens in Act One, Part 4?

- The action begins with a series of fantasy-like play-fights between Mickey, Sammy, Linda and a '**Kid**'. This ends with Linda protecting Mickey, foreshadowing future events.
- Sammy and other children run off, and Mickey then introduces Edward to Linda. Edward is easily led into firing Sammy's air-pistol and the three are caught by a Policeman.
- The Policeman warns Mrs Johnstone and threatens her with court, but tells Mrs Lyons it was just a '**prank**', suggesting she should not let Edward mix with Mickey. The difference in his attitude to the two parents is linked to their class.

How are the foundations laid for Act Two?

- It is clear Mrs Lyons' mental health has deteriorated when she demands they move house and she becomes superstitious, reacting to shoes on a table in the way Mrs Johnstone had done earlier in the play.
- Mickey and Edward sing about the contrasts between their lives.
- Mrs Johnstone is delighted to be moving to a new estate and sees it as a new start.

Five key quotations

1. Linda, foreshadowing the twins' deaths: **'When you die you'll meet your twinny again'**
2. Nature over nurture – Mrs Lyons' fear about Edward: **'... he's drawn to them? They're ... drawing him away from me.'**
3. Contrasting language of the Policeman: **'it'll be the courts for you, or worse'** (about Mickey); **'I'd just dock his pocket money if I was you.'** (about Edward)
4. Twins' views of one another: **'Wear clean clothes, talk properly like'** (Mickey about Edward); **'Run around with dirty knees like'** (Edward about Mickey)
5. Mrs Johnstone about a fresh start: **'A new destination,/And no reputation following me'**

Note it!

Notice how Edward gives Mickey a toy gun as a leaving present. Guns feature as a **motif** throughout their childhood games and the play as a whole. Mickey shoots Edward in the end, making this early gift a **symbolic** moment in their relationship.

Exam focus

How can I write about class prejudice? AO3

You can write about how prejudice is shown towards the working class.

Russell reflects the fact that working-class single mothers of this period had little chance to improve their situation, through Mrs Johnstone's response to her move: **'A new destination, And no reputation following me.'** She's delighted because she's aware of the opportunity available to her. Her reference to 'reputation' links to public opinion of her as a bad mother and implies the prejudice shown to single mothers. She needs to physically move away to stand a chance of changing her life positively.

Topic sentence/point

Embedded relevant quotation

Explains the quotation

Makes a clear link to the context of the text

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about class prejudice. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Prejudice towards the working class can be seen through the language used by the Policeman, who

My progress

Needs more work ☐

Getting there ☐

Sorted! ☐

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act Two, Part 1

Five key things about Act Two, Part 1 (pages 59–70)

1. Act Two starts **seven years on** from where Act One ended.
2. **Mrs Johnstone** is happy in her new home and area; her **life seems improved**.
3. Sammy's **violence has increased**; he burns down the school and threatens a bus conductor with a knife.
4. The **theme** of **class and life chances** is shown through the contrasting educations of **Mickey** and **Edward**.
5. The theme of **secrets** is developed when Edward is suspended from school over the locket. Edward refuses to tell Mrs Lyons where it came from.

What happens first in Act Two?

- Mrs Johnstone describes their new house as **'lovely'**.
- Russell reintroduces the image of Marilyn Monroe, comparing Mrs Johnstone to her in a positive way.
- Edward's life is shown to be secure and his education is that of a wealthy middle-class child.
- Mrs Johnstone is shown to have a very relaxed relationship with Mickey, while Mrs Lyons has a more formal relationship with Edward. She is anxious and looks to Edward for reassurance.
- Sammy fulfils a 1980s working-class **stereotype** by being on **'the dole'**, claiming benefits from the government.



What happens to the twins next?

- Sammy threatens the bus conductor; Mickey tries to diffuse the situation.
- Sammy tells Mickey to get off the bus with him but Linda stands up for Mickey and keeps him out of the situation.
- Edward's conversation with his teacher indicates that he has good life chances and is expected to attend a top university.
- Edward and Mickey are both suspended for being rude to their teachers, in Edward's case because he refuses to give up his locket. Linda defends Mickey against the teacher.
- Mrs Lyons reacts badly to seeing the photo in the locket, assuming it is Edward with Mrs Johnstone.

Five key quotations

1. Improvement in Mrs Johnstone's life: **'Since I pay me bills on time'**
2. Sammy's behaviour has worsened: **'our Sammy burnt the school down'**
3. Mrs Lyons, anxious despite the move: **'We're safe here, aren't we?'**
4. Narrator/Conductor doubts Mrs Johnstone's happiness: **'Content at last? Wiped out what happened, forgotten the past?'**
5. Limitations of Mickey and Linda's education: **'a class in a secondary modern school is formed – all boredom and futility.'** (stage directions)

Note it!

In some parts of the country, children sit an 11+ exam. Those who pass are offered places at grammar schools. At the time the play was written, these were more academic than the alternative, which were secondary modern schools.

Exam focus

How can I write about opportunity? AO2 AO3

You can explore the theme of opportunity through Mrs Johnstone.

Russell reminds us that Mrs Johnstone's happiness can't and won't last. 'Happy are y? Content at last? Wiped out what happened, forgotten the past? The use of numerous rhetorical questions reminds us that Mrs Johnstone's happiness can only be temporary and that her past decisions will catch up with her. As a working-class woman, who has made poor decisions out of desperation and a lack of education, she won't be allowed to be 'happy' and 'content'.

Topic sentence/point

Relevant quotation used

Explanation of the technique

Further development referring to wider context

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the changes between Act One and Act Two. Use quotations from the list.

Between Act One and Act Two, Mrs Johnstone's life has changed for the better, but in contrast, Mrs Lyons is still

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act Two, Part 2

Five key things about Act Two, Part 2 (pages 70-87)

1. Russell uses **dramatic irony** when the boys sing about wanting to look like each other while criticising their own appearance.
2. **Mrs Lyons' mental health** deteriorates – she **confronts Mrs Johnstone** with a kitchen knife.
3. A **time montage** shows Mickey, Edward and Linda having fun together as they grow up.
4. The boys fulfil the **stereotypes of their social class**; Mickey works in a factory and Edward goes to university.
5. Edward **admits his own feelings** for Linda but persuades Mickey and her to become a couple.



What happens at the start of Act Two, Part 2?

- Mickey tries to be romantic with Linda, on the hill overlooking the estate, but she storms off. He then admits his feelings for her.
- A boy Mickey had previously seen turns out to be Edward. Before recognising each other, each twin sings about the other's positive qualities.
- The twins become friends again and plan a trip to the cinema. Mickey has no money so Edward offers to pay but Mickey refuses.
- The boys go to Mickey's house. Mrs Johnstone is pleased to see Edward and asks about the locket. They joke about the film they are going to see and Edward declares Mrs Johnstone is '**fabulous**'.

What happens later in Act Two, Part 2?

- Mrs Lyons sneaks into Mrs Johnstone's kitchen to confront her. She tries to pay Mrs Johnstone to move again. Mrs Johnstone refuses the money and stands up to her.
- Mrs Lyons attacks Mrs Johnstone, who disarms her, reversing both the physical and mental balance of power between the two women.
- Mickey, Linda and Edward attract the attention of a policeman and repeat their responses from earlier in the play, re-enacting a childhood scene.
- Edward reveals his feelings for Linda but it is Mickey who later kisses her.

Five key quotations

1. The twins sing about each other: **'Each part of his face/Is in just the right place'.**
2. Mrs Johnstone is pleased to see Edward again: **'...stands looking at Edward and smiling.'**
3. Affectionate language to describe Mrs Johnstone: **'She's fabulous your ma, isn't she?'** (Edward); **'She's a fuckin' headcase.'** (Mickey)
4. Mrs Johnstone stands up to Mrs Lyons: **'I don't want your money. I've made a life out here. ... You move if you want to.'**
5. Trouble to come – the Narrator: **'An' you don't even notice broken bottles in the sand ... you can't understand/How living could be anything other than a dream'**

Note it!

Mrs Johnstone's reaction to Edward indicates how she has developed. Her superstitions from the start of the play and Mrs Lyons' threats of the twins' death no longer have power over her. The Narrator, however, is used to remind the audience of their fate.

Exam focus

How can I write about relationships?

AO1

AO2

You can explore Mickey and Edward's view of each other before they reunite.

Russell uses dramatic irony to show Edward and Mickey's feelings about each other. The twins singing 'Each part of his face is in the right place' about each other is a source of humour to the audience, who know they look very similar. It is also used to emphasise their attraction and admiration for one another. Despite the years spent apart, they are easily drawn to one another again.

Topic sentence/point

Embedded quotation

Explanation of the effect on the audience

Further development of the idea

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about relationships. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Russell conveys the twins' views of Mrs Johnstone before they go to the cinema when

My progress

Needs more work ☐

Getting there ☐

Sorted! ☐

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Act Two, Part 3

Five key things about Act Two, Part 3 (pages 87-108)

1. Russell shows the widening **inequality of opportunities** between the twins as they enter adulthood.
2. **Mickey** agrees to help Sammy with a **robbery** and ends up in prison.
3. **Edward** and **Linda** start an **affair**.
4. **Mrs Johnstone** tells Mickey and Edward that **they are twins**.
5. The **first scene** of the play is **re-enacted** and Mrs Lyons' invented **superstition** comes true when both twins die soon after learning they are brothers.

What happens early in Act Two, Part 3?

- Mickey tells Mrs Johnstone that Linda is pregnant and they get married.
- Mr Lyons sings about the redundancies at his factory, showing no remorse for making his workers, including Mickey, redundant. In the Dole-ites song, Russell **juxtaposes** Mr Lyons' view with that of unemployed working-class people.
- When Edward is back from university, Mickey tells him he is still a kid. Unlike him, Edward has no job worries or a wife to support.
- Edward confesses his feelings to Linda for the first time.



What happens later in Act Two, Part 3?

- Sammy and Mickey go to prison after Sammy shoots someone during the robbery. Mickey becomes depressed, then addicted to antidepressants.
- Edward arranges a new house and job for Mickey when he is released.
- Linda and Edward begin an affair, which Mrs Lyons reports to Mickey.
- Mickey confronts Edward while he's addressing a council meeting. Mrs Johnstone arrives and, trying to persuade Mickey to put the gun down, tells him and Edward they are twins.
- Furious that it was Edward who was given away and not him, Mickey accidentally pulls the trigger on his twin. Police gunmen then shoot Mickey.
- The Narrator summarises the play, suggesting **class** is to blame for the twins' tragedy.

Five key quotations

1. Contrasting views of unemployment: **'It's only a sign/Of the times'** (Mr Lyons); **'He's old before his time'** (Dole-ites about Mickey)
2. Sammy asks Mickey and Linda: **'What have y' got? Nothin', like me mam.'**
3. Mickey compares the twins' relationship then and now: **'It used to be just sweets an' ciggies he gave me ... Now it's a job and a house.'**
4. Mickey's reliance on antidepressants: **'That's why I take them. So I can be invisible.'**
5. Mickey, furious that Edward became a Lyons: **'How come you got everything ... an' I got nothin'?'**

Note it!

Note how the last few scenes focus on Mickey's life and the audience are left to assume that Edward leaves university and easily becomes a Councillor. This is a structural way of Russell showing the differences between middle- and working-class lives.

Exam focus

How can I write about the end of the play? AO1 AO2

You can explore character development at the end of the play.

Towards the end of the play, Russell makes it clear there is no opportunity for Mickey to improve his life on his own. Mickey confesses to taking antidepressants 'So I can be invisible'. The word 'invisible' not only emphasises how hopeless Mickey feels but is also symbolic of Russell's view that unemployed men and women of the time were overlooked and undervalued by employers and the government.

Topic sentence/point

Embedded, relevant quotation

Analysis of language

Link to play's context

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph linking theme to the play's structure. Use one of the quotations from the list.

The way Russell uses dramatic structure to reflect on characters' relationships can be seen when Mickey compares his and Edward's relationship.....

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Form and structure

Three key things about form and structure

- The **form** of *Blood Brothers* is a **musical**, which means some of the story is told via song.
- The play is a **cautionary tale** and has many of the features found in a **classical tragedy**.
- The play has a **cyclical** structure – opening with the final scene.



How does Russell use song in the play?

- Some of the songs are used as **soliloquies**, giving the audience a direct insight into characters' feelings without the other characters hearing them, e.g. when Edward and Mickey sing about the way each other looks in 'That Guy' in Act Two.
- Other songs are used to move the action forward, e.g. at the end of Act One Mrs Johnstone sings about moving house and all it will offer.
- The Narrator's songs are used to highlight and remind the audience of themes such as superstition and fate.

In what ways is the play a tragedy and a cautionary fairy tale?

- The Narrator acts as a storyteller, moving around the action unseen by the other characters and asking questions of the audience.
- Like a cautionary fairy tale, the play offers a moral warning about class division and its impact on lives.
- Like a classical tragedy, *Blood Brothers* has an inevitable tragic ending. However, unlike a classical tragedy, there isn't one central character responsible for their own downfall because of a fatal flaw.

How does Russell use a cyclical narrative in the play?

- The play's **prologue** shows the twins' death and starts the play at the end.
- The deaths are seen again at the end of the play.
- Russell uses the same lines at the start and end of the play. Mrs Johnstone repeats, '**Tell me it's not true**', which emphasises her grief and the inevitability of the twins' deaths.

Five key quotations

1. Narrator in the prologue: **'So did y' hear the story of the Johnstone twins? As like each other as two new pins'**
2. Mrs Lyons on the separation of the twins: **'We made an agreement, a bargain. You swore on the Bible.'**
3. The twins become friends – Mickey: **'this means that we're blood brothers'**
4. Social class drives the twins apart again – Edward: **'I thought, I thought we always stuck together. I thought we were ... were blood brothers.'**
5. The play's climax – Mrs Johnstone: **'Tell me it's not true,/Say it's just a story.'**

Note it!

Unlike most plays, the action continuously flows without scene breaks. This adds to the pace of the play and makes it feel as if we're speeding towards the inevitable tragedy we have seen at the beginning.

Exam focus

How can I write about the form of the play? AO1 AO2 AO3

You can use the character of the Narrator to explore the play as a cautionary fairy tale.

The Narrator acts as a traditional storyteller. At the start of the play he asks the audience if they have heard 'the story of the Johnstone twins', setting himself up in the role of knowledgeable storyteller. He can't be seen by the other characters who are acting out the story he is telling, like a narrator or storyteller in a traditional fairy tale.

Introduces point about the form

Relevant evidence

Explains effect

Develops point, linked to literary context

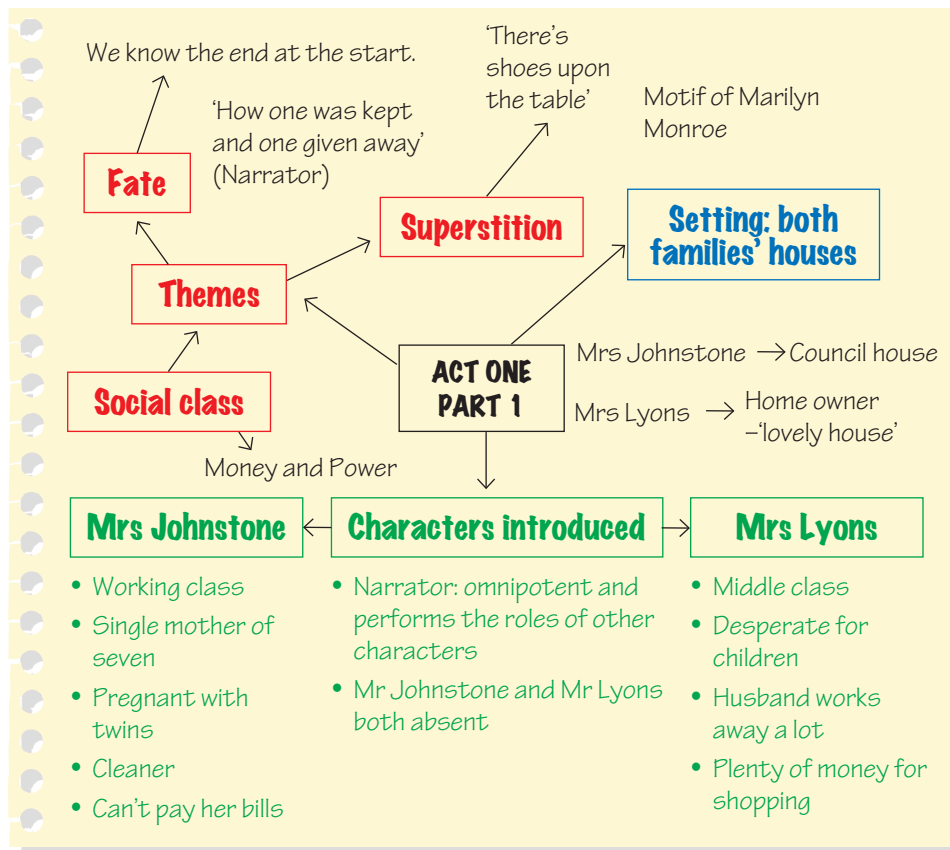
Now you try!

Finish this paragraph linking structure to theme. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Russell's use of the cyclical narrative is most evident when he presents the fate of the twins in the prologue, with

PLOT AND STRUCTURE Quick revision

1. Look at this ideas map representing Act One, Part 1 of the play. Is there anything else you can add?



2. Create your own ideas map for one of the other sections.

Quick quiz

Answer these quick questions about the play's plot and structure.

1. What type of play is *Blood Brothers*?
2. Who does the Narrator ask us to judge at the start?
3. What type of narrative does Russell use?
4. What type of house do the Johnstones live in?

5. How many children in total does Mrs Johnstone give birth to?
6. How old are the twins when they become blood brothers?
7. Name one thing Edward likes about Mickey when they first meet.
8. Name the Hollywood actress used as a motif throughout the play.
9. What is Mr Lyons' job?
10. What does Mrs Lyons do when Edward swears at her?
11. Where do both families move to when they leave Liverpool?
12. What type of school does Mickey attend?
13. What is Sammy claiming from the government?
14. Who stands up for Mickey at school?
15. Name one thing the three friends do during the time lapse montage.
16. Choose one adjective the Narrator uses to describe their teenage years.
17. Who does Sammy compare Mickey to when telling him he has nothing?
18. What does Mickey become addicted to in prison?
19. What does Edward help Linda to get?
20. What does the Narrator suggest is to blame for the tragedy?

Power paragraphs

Write a **paragraph** in response to **each of these questions**. For each, try to **use one quotation** you have learned from this section.

1. In what ways does Russell contrast Mickey and Edward in Act One?
2. Why does Russell choose to include the scenes with Edward and Mickey at school?

Exam practice

Re-read the section in Act Two where Edward confesses his feelings for Linda, while on stage Sammy persuades Mickey to take a part in the robbery (pages 93–5).

Why is this moment significant in the text as a whole? Write **two paragraphs** explaining your ideas. You could comment on:

- Mickey's desperation and relationship with Sammy
- the admission of Edward's feelings and the impact this has.

SETTING AND CONTEXT Britain in the 1950s to 1980s

Five key things about Britain in the 1950s to 1980s

1. **Family structures** were very traditional and **patriarchal**.
2. There was a strong **class divide financially**, and in **housing** and **education**.
3. In the late **1950s** and early **1960s** the 'teenager' became a recognised label – they were considered **carefree**, as shown in the **time montage** in Act Two.
4. In the **1970s traditional industries** such as shipbuilding and mining were **in decline** and **unemployment rose**.
5. In the early **1980s**, under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the **trade unions** who protected workers' rights were **weakened** and **unemployment worsened**.



What was the class system in Britain like at the time?

- The class system divided society into working class, middle class and upper class.
- Working-class people worked in a trade or unskilled work. Middle-class people were much more likely to go to university and take up professional careers or work in management.
- Via the 11+ exam, 20% of pupils were selected to go to grammar schools. The rest went to secondary moderns, which often led to few qualifications.
- Working-class families were more likely to live in council housing, whereas middle-class families could afford to buy their own home.

How did unemployment affect people in Britain?

- Mass unemployment left many families living on 'the dole' – a small weekly benefit payment from the government.
- Unemployment left people (particularly men) feeling desperate, and led to a rise in depression and crime.

What did the average family look like?

- Most families during this time still consisted of a mother, father and children.
- Single mothers (like Mrs Johnstone) were often looked down upon. 'The pill', allowing for birth control, was only introduced in 1961.
- The men usually went to work, while the women stayed at home with the family.

Five key quotations

1. Mickey's education: *'a class in a secondary modern school is formed – all boredom and futility.'*
2. Mr Lyons' middle-class attitude to unemployment: *'And for the moment we suggest/You don't become too depressed/As it's only a sign/Of the times'*
3. Edward's reaction to unemployment: *'So you're not working. Why is it so important?'*
4. Mickey on the effects of unemployment: *'while no one was looking I grew up. An' you didn't, because you didn't need to'*
5. Lack of prospects for the working class – the Dole-ites: *'Get used to being idle/In a year or two.'*

Note it!

Mickey's experiences embody all that Russell believed was wrong with society in Britain. His chances are affected by his poor education and the lack of work options once he is made redundant from his low-skilled job.

Exam focus

How do I write about the play's social context? AO3

You can explore the idea of opportunity linked to class, in relation to the twins.

Russell creates a sense of hopelessness as the opportunities available to Mickey and Edward, representatives of the working and middle classes, become more divisive. As children, in Act One, the boys don't notice the divide, and appear to have more in common than separates them. However, in Act Two, Mickey's lack of opportunities means he 'grew up' faster than Edward who 'didn't need to'. This class difference results in a clear divide between the brothers in adulthood.

Topic sentence: links characters to social context

Connection made between context and structure

Relevant embedded quotations

Clear explanation of context

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the play's social context. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Russell shows the effects of the recession through Mr Lyons' words to his workers . . .