

WILLY RUSSELL'S BLOOD Brothers

“DRAMA: PERFORMANCE AND RESPONSE” EXAM: SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS ON TEXT COMPONENT 04: 80 MARKS (50 MARKS FOR BLOOD BROTHERS)

KEY ROLES

DIRECTOR - A director is responsible for the overall creative vision of the show. They have to bring the different elements of the production together to produce a cohesive final production, having meetings with the design team at various stages during a production. They will also direct the performers and help them develop their characters in rehearsals ahead of the final performance.

DESIGNERS - The design team are often brought together by the director of a production and will work closely together to help deliver the director's artistic vision. Some of their work may be done in advance of rehearsals, but they will often continue to work on a show until it opens.

COSTUME DESIGNER - A costume designer is responsible for designing the costume, hair and make-up for a production, working closely with the design team to ensure that the costumes match the style of the show. They will often create designs ahead of the production being cast and can then make changes once they have met the performers. The costume designer works closely with the costume department, who are responsible for making the outfits and wigs.

LIGHTING DESIGNER is responsible for designing the lighting within a production, working closely with the director and the design team to create lighting states for atmosphere and mood on stage. The lighting designer will often have an initial idea about how the lighting will look for a show and will then make adjustments during the rehearsal process. Once their design work is complete, technicians will rig and programme the lights.

Different lighting effects

1. Spot - has a hard-edged effect, used to light characters or elements on the stage. Coloured filters can be used with this lamp.

2. Fresnel - used for a softer edged effect, with a diffusing lens in front of the lamp. It's useful for good overall light when used with others. Coloured filters can be used with this lamp.

3. Flood - produces a clear wide-angled light, but there's little control over the spread of the light. Coloured filters can be used with this lamp. (Example, you could add a light pink gel to light up the stage like the early morning.)

Strobe - a flashing light, used for special effects. It's often used to give the effect of old movies. It produces a jerky effect on the movements of actors when used on its own.

Gobo - Some can also be fitted with what is known as a gobo. This is a sheet inserted on a frame at the front of the light with a design cut into it. It filters the light, creating a picture effect on the stage. For example, a gobo could be used to create a dappled lighting effect to look like the leaves of a forest, or could be cut to create strips of light onstage which look like the bars of a prison. We have used this in our GCSE play Slow Time to project bars of prison cells. Or think of the Batman gobo!

ANSWERING PHYSICAL SKILLS

Top band answer

- Body language
- Gestures
- Movement/levels

How could the actor playing Linda use physical techniques to communicate the intentions of the character to the audience? (6 marks)

As an Actor playing the character Linda I would use my physical skills to communicate her intentions the moment when she is hiding the pills from Mickey in their home. I would show this on the line "what about me, what about how I feel". I would have my **body language** curled up on the floor in a ball. I would do this to show how trapped I feel in my relationship with Mickey and how physically he is breaking me down with his addiction. My hand **gestures** would show me clutching the pills with all my strength. This would show my anger I have towards the pill and what they are doing to the man I love. The gesture would also communicate the intention that she doesn't want to give in and give him the pills. My **movement/levels** would be limited as I'm crawling myself on the floor. This would be to show how numb I am to feeling this emotion and give the intention I have given up. My **levels** would also give the indication how much Mickey and his mental state has brought me down as a character.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF STAGING

1) Reverse - audience set out in two lines facing each other. Actors perform either end of space or in the centre.
Positives - intimate stage, good for plays and scenes with two sets or two opposing sides.
Negatives - more limited in terms of scene and set changes.

2) Theatre in the round - audience set around the actors in a circle. Entrances and exits through aisles between the audience.
Negative - Limited staging and set changes and potential for back to the audience.
Positives - Highly intimate and immersive experience for audience.

3) Proscenium Arch - school Hall, set pieces can wheel on form wings, set can be flown down, curtains can close and pen for set changes, gauze curtain to make things behind appear and disappear with lighting, orchestra pit below in front.
Negative - less intimate stage, audience at back of auditorium could feel disengaged.
Positive - allows for changeable sets, audience can all view the stage at all times, suits a spectacle, backdrops can be changed (poor word for this is a cyclorama!)

4) Promenade - the audience follow the actors to different scenes in different locations.
Negative - The audience can get restless walking between sets and the play can become fragmented.
Positive - exciting and the audience can feel they are journeying through the story with the characters.

5) Composite stage - a stage with different levels and sections.
Negative - the set could look complicated and different levels may not fit the whole play.
Positive - different levels can convey status of characters, a different visual interest and convey different locations on one stage.

6) Thrust - the set jets out into the audience.
Negative - the thrust can not have complicated sets on and scene changes as it is always visible to the audience.
Positives - the actors can get nearer to the audience in key scenes where they talk to the audience or scenes we should focus on just one character.

What is set design?

Set design is the creation of the performance space. This can include designing rooms, furniture, outdoor places or abstract spaces. Set design responds to the needs of the production and can suggest - creative solutions - to problems presented by the text. The set communicates with the audience: it is not just a location for the play, but a vital part of what the audience will experience, feel and think. Set design can mean a large scale, spectacular design, but it can also mean a clever solution with very limited budget or resources.

Where is the audience?
Thinking about the audience is a big part of the set designer's role. Consider different audience configurations.
End on or proscenium arch:
All the audience are seated together facing the stage.
In-the-round:
The audience surround the actors in a circle of square.
Traverse:
The audience sit in two lines facing each other.
Thrust:
The audience sit on three sides of the stage.

- What is it you create for set design?
- Furniture
 - Projections
 - Back drop
 - Props
 - Rostra /staging blocks



ANSWERING VOCAL SKILLS

Top band answer

Complete the table below by listing three ways an actor could use their VOICE to portray the character. Justify your choices with examples from Blood Brothers. (6 marks)

Character: Mrs Lyons

Different types of voice	Justification
Posh Accent	"Oh Edward darling where did you hear such a silly word like that". When she is speaking to Edward as a child. I would have her say this in a posh accent to exaggerate Willy Russell's social class divide.
Loud volume	"They are born, you didn't notify me". I would have her say this in a loud volume to show how angry she is Mrs Johnstone kept it from her that the twins have been born. This could link to the theme of Money Mrs Lyons thinking she can speak down to Mrs Johnstone as if she owns her because she has more money.
Fast paced	"Edward, where did you get this locket from. When where you pictured with this woman". I would have her say this in a fast pace to show how manic she is that she thinks she has seen an image of Edward and Mrs J and the idea she is starting to believe her own lie, linking with fate and destiny.

CONTEXT, THEMES, CHARACTERS AND SEMIOTICS...

Context of Blood Brothers

Willy Russell wrote Blood Brothers and is known as one of Liverpool's most famous writers. Willy Russell was born into a working class family, he left school at 15 and became a hairdresser before deciding to go back to school and complete his qualifications. He eventually became a teacher but remained interested in writing and performing music.



Historical Context

Blood Brothers is set in the late 1950s and early 1980s, during this time Liverpool was predominantly working class society. Over this time, Liverpool was an ever-changing city and due to the city's major port on the Mersey estuary, it sustained attacks during the Second World War, it endured more Blitz attacks than any other city apart from London. With almost half the city's housing destroyed, the 1950s and 60s saw many new estates being built, some outside of the original city, to replace the housing lost during the war.

In the mid-1970s, changes to manufacturing processes and the ways goods were transported had a major impact on Liverpool's industry. The docks, which had previously been a major source of employment, were badly hit, thousands of households fell into poverty; crime levels increased; housing was allowed to deteriorate and illegal drug use became more common. Many people were made redundant, and by the 1990s, Liverpool had some of the highest unemployment rates in the UK. Some of this context is directly reflected in the play, for example, Russell shows the terrible effects of unemployment on Mickey's self-esteem and also through Sammy's use of crime.



Cultural Context

During the late 1950s and early 1980s many cultures evolved during this time.

Marilyn Monroe was a huge film star in the 1950s. Starting out as a model, she soon broke into the movie industry, starring in films such as 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' and 'Some Like It Hot'. With striking blond hair, a curvy figure and a breathy voice, she was seen as a sex symbol and was presented by the media as a kind of 'perfect' fantasy woman and she was shown to live a glamorous and carefree lifestyle.



Although she was a successful film star, Marilyn's personal life was troubled. In 1956, she married Miller, but this marriage also ended in divorce in 1961. She suffered miscarriages during her marriage to Miller, and was believed to be addicted to painkillers. She was also treated for depression. In 1962, Marilyn Monroe was found dead in bed from an overdose. Although it was ruled that she committed suicide, there are numerous conspiracy theories surrounding her death.

Russell uses references to Monroe throughout the play. At each point he refers to a different aspect of her life and public image. Mrs Johnstone enjoys the glamour of Monroe's public image. Later in the play Mickey becomes hooked on anti-depressant 'nerve pills' and this is compared to Monroe's own depression.

In the 1950s society went through massive changes. As a result of young people gradually having more money, popular culture (music, TV and film) flourished, becoming accessible to a much wider public. Even the poorest in society, people represented in the play by the fictional Johnstone family, would have had the chance to go to the cinema or to a club for dancing.



Think about the various ways characters in Blood Brothers are influenced by music, film and, especially, fantasy. Mr. Johnstone's attitude toward his wife is based on her likeness to Marilyn Monroe. Mrs Johnstone's love of 'dancing' is a love of escape from her everyday life. The boys' love of playful but 'violent' games, playing at 'cavboys' and gangsters is influenced by films.

Political Context

Blood Brothers was completed in 1981, two years after the Conservative party leader Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. She felt that British manufacturing industry had become uncompetitive and therefore she reduced the powers of the workers' unions and privatised 'sold off' many publicly owned companies. She closed many uncompetitive coal mines, too.



One of Thatcher's central political beliefs was that success came to those who chose to work hard. In Blood Brothers, Russell contradicts this view. He shows a divided society by having Mickey and Edward attend very different schools and live in different houses.

That money and influential connections are necessary to become successful is written into the play. Mickey's failure, despite his good character and hard work, is the basis of the tragedy in the drama.



In Blood Brothers there are many different symbols and signs presented throughout he play that create various meanings to the plot and for the audience.

Some examples of these is:



The Gun Motif. We see reference to the Gun/Guns throughout the play which is a symbol for the Fate and Destiny of Mickey and Eddie's death. For example, the various times we see reference to the gun is in the following scenes

- Mickey during 'I wish I was our Sammy' mimes a gun before he begins
- Kids Game- Sammy has a pretend Toy Guns that fires GAPS
- Mickey steals Sammy's air pistol for him, Linda and Edward
- Edward buys Mickey his own air pistol before he moves away
- Sammy gets a real gun that Mickey stands by for Sammy's cover
- Mickey finds out about Sammy and Linda gets the gun from the same place on stage
- Both Brothers get shot by gunshot



Shoes upon the table- This was the first symbolic item that spares on to the script the indication of superstition is when 'Mrs Johnstone' puts shoes on the table this indicates to 'Mrs Lyons' that Mrs Johnstone believes in superstitions which leads to the following:

- She makes Mrs Lyons swear on the Bible as an oath
- When Mrs Lyons Feels as though she is losing the oath that Mrs Johnston and herself have made she makes up a new superstition 'If ever a twin knows they were both separated at birth they both shall die'
- It triggers Mrs Lyons when Edward starts believing in the 'Bogey Man' The Lyons move to the countryside and Edward talks about seeing a black magpie and Mrs Lyons reacts to it
- Mrs Lyons starts to believe in her own superstition that Mrs Johnstone is following her and attacks her with a knife
- There's a mad woman on the hill plays referring to witches
- There is a sequence in narration of Mickey, Edward and Linda growing up that refers to the unknown that has sealed their fates without them
- The Brothers sealed fate when the pact has been broken



The locket- Before he moves away from Liverpool, Edward receives a locket from Mrs. Johnstone with a picture of herself and Mickey in it. Although he doesn't know that he possesses a picture of his mother and brother, Edward treasures the locket.

- Edward treasures the locket, even getting into trouble at his boarding school for refusing to remove it when ordered to do so by a teacher.
- On a narrative level, the locket symbolizes the bond that Edward feels with Mickey.
- On a deeper level, however, the locket illuminates the connection between Edward, Mickey, and Mrs. Johnstone—a connection which, despite Mrs. Lyons' best efforts, cannot be severed.
- On the question of nature vs. nurture, the locket represents Russell leaning towards the side of nature, implying that although Edward has been separated from his blood relations, he still feels a deep and powerful connection to them. It also triggers Mrs Lyons belief in that the deal she has made may be coming into play and she starts to spiral into paranoia.



Mickey's anti-depressants- During his time in prison, Mickey suffers a mental breakdown and is eventually prescribed anti-depressants, to which he becomes addicted

- he continues to take his pills, symbolizing how far he has fallen and how much he has lost due to his unemployment and prison time.
- after nearly overcoming his addiction for Linda's sake, Mickey grows incensed and insane when he finds out that his wife and Edward have been having an affair.
- On a broader level within the play, anti-depressants also symbolize the "quick fix" that psychiatrists believed such drugs to be in the early 80s.
- Rather than actually dealing with other underlying issues, many patients like Mickey were immediately prescribed powerful medications, which put them in a state of foggy numbness rather than actual helping their mental states. (It's important to remember, however, that although Russell's portrayal of antidepressants is wholly negative, they are necessary and life-saving medication for many people. In the case of the play, anti-depressants are less a condemnation of these drugs themselves, and more a representation of the struggles of addiction, and the tendency to turn to substances when faced with overwhelming difficulties.)

Themes of Blood Brothers

Nature Vs Nurture

The 'nature versus nurture' debate is represented through Mickey and Eddie. They are twins and so the difference in the way their lives turn out must be a result of their different upbringing and social positions.

Russell uses the twins to persuade us that attitudes in different societies passed on to their children more than their individual efforts at wanting to do well.

Edward says 'I'm different' when Margaret Thatcher was



Social Class

The contrast between the two families the Lyons and the Johnstone forms the heart of the play. The leading characters can be seen to be stuck in stereotypes. They are presented in a more exaggerated way to emphasize the differences in social class. Why Russell does this to show the unfairness that it results in.

Growing Up

Life, for the children, is shown to be a conifer game in fact. However, the pressures of growing up in different backgrounds and educational systems are shown to bring problems later.

It is the different experience of growing up that ends the friendship between Edward and Mickey. For example, after Mickey loses his job Edward tries to be positive about his situation but Mickey tells Edward that he cannot understand living on the dole. He says that Edward hasn't had to grow up yet, to face the difficulties of the real world and that they have anything in common any more.



Money

Mrs. Johnstone's life is, in debt, buying things on the 'credit heater', leads to problems but Mrs Lyons' wealthy existence fails to bring her happiness either. Money controls the relationship of Edward and Mickey too - once Edward returns from university he is a wealthy man. Russell suggests that his friendship with the penniless Mickey can no longer be the same, as he cannot appreciate Mickey's reaction to being asked and not see Mickey's side show him to accept financial help from Edward.



Fate, Destiny and Superstition

Each of the leading characters appear trapped and plagued by various kinds of misfortune and bad luck. Russell seems to be asking us to consider whether there is such a thing as fate or destiny or whether life passes out because of nature rather than supernatural reasons. Because of the way we are educated and live.



Education

This theme is linked to social class. Russell shows that wealth brings different educational opportunities and these lead to very different futures. Eddie and Mickey are educated differently. One goes on to university and a successful career in politics, the other takes a factory job making bowls. Recklessness and lack of opportunity then lead Mickey to crime, drug addiction and depression. Without a better education Russell is saying that Mickey had few options, and so we are asked to see Mickey's mistakes in a sympathetic way.

The effects of education shape the lives of the women in the play too. When Mrs Johnstone loses her husband, she falls into poverty, from which her lack of education has provided her with very little means of escape. She can only secure unskilled work and has to rely on the State for housing. Compare this with Mrs Lyons who, similarly, might reasonably be expected to have a better education, is not self-reliant. In this case Russell is suggesting perhaps that the traditional view the women had have less freedom, even when they are educated.



Men and Women

The three leading female characters in the play (Mrs Johnstone, Mrs Lyons and Linda) suffer at the hands of the men in their lives - they are either let down by their husbands or receive no affection from them. Russell presents a world where the roles of women and men are sharply separate, because of the roles given to men and women within their social classes. The female characters tend to be more passive, the male characters are shown being active and macho.



Characters in Blood Brothers

- Narrator
- Mr and Mrs Lyons
- Edward Lyons
- Mrs Johnstone
- Mickey Johnstone
- Sammy and Donna- Marie Johnstone
- Linda
- Minor characters – the ensemble chorus –

Police, milkman, gynaecologist, judge, bailiffs, prison guards, counsellors ,

Key scenes in Blood Brothers

- Both die at the beginning.
- Mrs Lyons asks Mrs J to give a baby to hers and makes them swear on the Bible, then makes a
- Mickey and Eddie meet and the become Blood Brothers
- Mickey introduces Eddie to Linda where the love triangle begins
- Mrs Lyons paranoia leads to a decision of moving away
- Mrs J gives Edward the locket
- The Johnstone's move to Skelmersdale
- Sammy gets into an altercation with a bus conductor where Mickey tries to stick up for him but Linda protects his him
- Mickey and Edward both end up getting kicked out from school
- Edward and Mickey both bond over the song "that guy" and spend the summer together with the narration sequence of them growing up 15-18.
- Edward goes off to university and Mickey is working at factory, Mickey gets sacked and Edward gets a



What is "semiotics?"

Semiotics in Drama is when an audience will read and interpret the signs and symbols presented to them on stage at all times –

This is called semiotics.