

## Plot part 1 - Act 1

The play starts with the narrator talking about a 'story about the Johnstone twins' and two men laid dead on the stage. We go back in time where we learn Mrs Johnstone's husband has just left her; she is very poor and already has 7 children. She starts a new job cleaning Mrs Lyons' house and finds out she's expecting twins. She strikes up a deal with Mrs L as she can't afford to keep both so Mrs L convinces Mrs J to give her one of the babies as her husband is currently away on business and she can't have a child of her own. The babies are born and Mrs J begrudgingly hands one of the babies over for Mrs L to later fire her. The narrator states that one day the devil will punish the two women. Mickey and Eddie meet for the first time by chance at the park and become 'blood brothers' when they find out they share the same birthday. When Mrs J realise the two have met, she is horrified and sends Edward home. Mrs L reacts more violently and slaps Edward when he swears at her. She even contemplates uprooting her entire family in order to escape. Despite their mothers' disapproval, the boys continue to see each other and play lots of children's games with their friend, Linda. They play various pranks and end up getting caught by the police who threatens Mrs J but flatters Mr L. Mrs L decides they should move, before Edward leaves Mrs J gives him a locket with a picture of herself and Mickey. The Johnstones' also find out they are being relocated.

Both boys have become interested in girls but feel awkward. Edward attends boarding school. Mickey and Linda have romantic feelings for each other but Mickey's lack of confidence is getting in the way. Sammy attempts to rob a bus by holding the driver at knife point. Mickey and Eddie both struggle at school- Mickey insults a teacher and Edward refuses to take off the locket. When Mrs L finds out, she's appalled but is more upset when she sees the content of the locket. The narrator returns to remind the audience that the devil will come. Mickey and Edward meet, by circumstance again- Mickey takes Edward back to his but they are not aware that Mrs L is following them. Once the boys leave the house, Mrs L attacks Mrs J with a knife and curses her, calling her a witch. The boys meet with Linda and spend the summer together- an idyllic sequence follows as the trio age from 14 to 18.

## Context:

Liverpool was a city of many contrasts, there was a big gap between the rich and the poor. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century because of the silting\* of the river, it was a place of financial depression which led to unemployment and strikes  
In 1981 Margaret Thatcher had been the British Prime Minister for 2 years. She was the leader of the Conservative party and as Prime Minister she and her party had reduced the power of the trade unions in the hope of making British industry more competitive. This affected cities that relied on their manufacturing industries, including Liverpool. One result was a huge rise in unemployment, leading significant impacts on the lives of the people who lived there. There was an increase of poverty, crime and drug abuse.

Grammar Schools:

- Students had to pass the 11+ test to get into the grammar schools.
- 11+ assessed the students academic ability.
- Top 20% of students attended grammar schools.
- Grammar schools taught a highly academic curriculum.
- Grammar school received more funding than secondary modern schools.

Secondary moderns:

- Students who did not pass the 11+ attended secondary modern schools.
- Taught more practical subjects, aiming to prepare students for more administrative or manual jobs.
- Received less funding than grammar schools.
- Students from a lower or working class background attended secondary modern schools

Private schools:

- Only 7% of students were educated in private school.
- Students were often boarders, meaning they lived at school.
- The average boarding school fees would be approximately 25% of the average wage.
- Only affordable to those earning considerably more than the average.

## Tier 3 vocabulary

**Foreshadowing** – hinting at future event

**Dialect** – a particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group

**Elision** – the omission of a sound or syllable when speaking (as in *I'm, let's*)

**Received pronunciation** – the standard form of British English pronunciation

**Characterisation** – the creation or construction of a fictional character

**Epic Theatre** – a type of theatre used to talk about socio-economic issues

## Tier 2 vocabulary

**Repulsion** - a feeling of intense distaste or disgust

**Prejudice** - dislike, hostility, or unjust behaviour deriving from preconceived and unfounded opinions

**Status** - high rank or social standing

**Manipulation** - the action of manipulating something in a skilful manner

**Deprivation** - the lack or denial of something considered to be a necessity

**Class** - a division of a society based on social and economic status

**Dysfunctional** - not operating normally or properly

**Aspirations** - a hope or ambition of achieving something

# Year 9: Blood Brothers

## Plot part 2 - Act 2

At 18 in the sequence, the narrator warns that soon, both their joy and childhood will end. Edward has developed feelings for Linda and is at university whilst Mickey works in a factory. Edward self-sacrifices his feelings and encourages Mickey to ask Linda to be his girlfriend and she accepts. In October, Mickey tells his mum that Linda is pregnant and the two will be getting married. Their wedding coincides with a huge economic downturn resulting in Mickey getting paid off. When Edward returns from Christmas, Mickey is downtrodden and claims 'blood brothers' is childish. Edward confesses his love to Linda but she tells him she is married and pregnant. A desperate Mickey participates in a burglary with Sammy that goes wrong resulting in Sammy killing a man. They are both sentenced to prison and Mickey becomes depressed and is prescribed antidepressants which he becomes addicted to, even after he's been released Mickey continues to take the pills despite Mrs J & Linda's pleas. Linda, desperate, asks Edward, now a city councilman, to find them an apartment and getting Mickey a job. Mickey is angry about this and a devastated Linda seeks comfort with Edward and begins an affair with him. The affair continues and Mickey stops taking his pills for Linda's sake. Mrs Lyons reveals Linda and Edward's affair to Mickey. Enraged, he takes Sammy's gun out of the floorboards and confronts Edward, with a distraught Mrs J and Linda trying to get him to stop. The narrator warns the devil has arrived. Mickey finds and confronts Edward at the town hall about the affair, as well as whether Mickey's daughter is actually his. Edward denies fathering Mickey's child. The police surround the area and Mrs J bursts in and tells the boys they are twins separated at birth. Mickey asks why he couldn't have been Edward and then accidentally pulls the trigger of the gun, shooting and immediately killing Edward, the police then shoot Mickey. The play ends with the boys led on the stage and the narrator wonders what really killed the twins: superstition or the class system?

## Characters

**Mickey Johnstone** The lower-class twin. He is honest, sincere and goodhearted. He impregnates Linda, gets laid off, is arrested for Sammy's crime and ends up in prison and addicted to anti-depressants. His rage at Linda & Edward for having an affair drives the play's finale

**Edward Lyons** Is also good-natured but the higher-class twin. His sheltered upbringing makes him innocent but because of class he gets good opportunities e.g. university and a good job. His good-natured manner leads to the play's final scene

**Mrs Johnstone** Biological mother of the twins and a horde of other children. Left by her husband she gets a job as a cleaner. She is the moral centre of the play; is tortured by guilt and regret

**Mrs Lyons** Opposite of Mrs J whom she employs as a cleaner. She adopts Edward as her own child. Is haunted by the original act of a mother giving up her child. The guilt turns into suspicion and paranoia. She announces the affair and contributes to the murder of her adopted son

**Linda** Begins as a tomboyish young girl but both twins fancy her from an early stage. She only has eyes for Mickey as a teenager but later turns to Edward for comfort and support, which turns into an affair. Despite this, she loves both twins and is a sympathetic character

**Narrator** All-knowing and always slightly menacing- takes many roles throughout the play. Narrator constantly reminds the audience of the terrible choice that began this chain of events. Frequent mentions of fate and superstition but the Narrator claims it was class, not fate

**Sammy** When they are younger, Mickey just wants to be like Sammy. Quickly becomes a juvenile delinquent; even attempting to rob a bus as a teenager- he ends up in prison with Mickey

**Mr Lyons** Married to Mrs Lyons- away so Mrs L can adopt Edward. Grows increasingly concerned about his wife's mental health and wellbeing

## Themes

**Education:** Due to class, education is offered differently to the two boys- with Edward being in a private, boarding school and Mickey a comprehensive school where Mickey is poorly educated

**Superstition:** The audience is constantly reminded of this, as well as the superstition Mrs Lyons creates. The narrator also refers to other superstitions throughout the various songs in the play

**Violence:** The children play with toy guns and violent games out in the street. This foreshadows the violent path Mickey takes and the ultimate violent ending to the boys' lives

**Money:** Mrs J can't afford to feed an extra two children and ends up getting her furnishings on the catalogue being taken away whilst pregnant. The children have broken toys which compares to Mrs L who can afford all of the luxuries when Edward is born

**Class:** Mickey has less opportunities, poor education and an unsecure job- he is involved in drugs, depression and crime because of his poverty. Edward has all the opportunities: a good education, university and a good job. Both boys are also treated differently by society and authoritative figures.

**Nature versus Nurture:** Focuses on the idea of what will happen if a person's character is determined by their genetics or upbringing. In this case, it is their upbringing- Mickey wishes to have had Edward's life at the end of the play

**Fate:** The idea that because of class, the boys' fate was always decided and instead it was fate, not superstition that caused their death

**Friendship:** There are close friendships between the boys as well as Linda which strengthens and suffers at different times, specifically as the boys get older as one gets everything he wants and the other does not due to their social classes