Blood Brothers Context

1. Where is the setting of Blood Brothers?

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2. What qualities are Liverpudlians known for?

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3. Which character typifies these qualities?

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4. What were the unemployment figures in Liverpool during the 1980’s?

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5. At what time is Blood Brothers set?

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6. Why might Mrs Johnstone’s neighbours disapprove of her?

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7. Find 5 key facts about education during this time.

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8. What was the name given to manual workers?

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9. What type of houses did most working class people live in?

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10. What were the conditions of the Council Houses like?

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11. Why were ‘New’ towns created?

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12. What was the name of the ‘New’ town that was created?

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13. What effect did uprooting people have?

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14. What were the aims of the playwright?

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15. Which characters highlight this aim?

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Liverpool

Liverpool, because of its position on the River Mersey, was a prosperous seaport in the 19th century.

It is a city of many contrasts.

In the 20th century, because of the silting of the river, it was a place of financial depression, which led to unemployment and strikes.

There was a big gap between the rich and the poor.

The People of Liverpool

Liverpudlians are known for their warmth, hospitality and wit.

Liverpool is also famous for its football teams and impact on culture – the Mersey Beat (poetry), the Beatles (music) and playwrights, architects etc.

Mrs Johnstone’s wit and warmth typify these qualities.

Unemployment

Unemployment reached 25% in the 1980s.

At the time the play is set, factories were closing down. At the start of act 2, Sammy is already on the dole, and the song ‘Take a Letter Miss Jones’ illustrates how this rising unemployment adversely affects Mickey’s life and tempts him into crime.

Being out of work creates low self-esteem; particularly for traditional men who feel they need to support their family.
**Views at the time**

Blood Brothers is set in Liverpool, between the 1950s and the 1970s.

At the time, people strongly disapproved of sex before marriage and this is why Mrs Johnstone ‘has to’ marry quickly.

Divorce was uncommon and this is another reason the neighbours might disapprove of her.

Although the 1945 Education act had made grammar schools free, working class children had to pass the 11+ to gain entry to the grammar schools. The pass mark was kept deliberately high. Few children were allowed the privilege of a grammar school education, and even if they gained a place, there was no guarantee that they would leave with qualifications, as the school leaving age was 15.

**Grammar Schools**

Pupils at grammar schools studied academic subjects and took O levels. Some went on to take A levels, while others were under pressure from parents to leave school, get a job and bring money into the household.

There were far fewer university places then, so most would go into employment after school.

**Secondary Modern Schools**

Children who failed the 11+ would go to a secondary modern school to be prepared for life in the trades. Boys would study practical skills like bricklaying, alongside academic work, and girls would learn how to cook. Many of these schools were under-funded.
Qualifications

If pupils were not considered ‘bright’ they were not allowed to take CSEs. These qualifications were not worth as much as O Levels, taken at grammar school. (GCSEs are much more inclusive) So it was common for children to leave school without any qualifications at all. It was more difficult for them to get on in life.

Poverty

There is a clearly established link between poverty and under-achievement at school. Edward is sent to a private, fee-paying boarding school and will take O levels, A levels and go on to university.
Mickey leaves school and goes into employment; things go wrong when he is made redundant, whereas Edward has a much more secure ‘white collar’ job. Manual workers were called ‘blue collar’ workers; they were more affected by closure of factories and the scarcity of work connected with the docks.

Council Housing

Council houses were the homes of most working class people in the 1950s and 1960s. The terraced houses had a lot to recommend them, but they were also cramped and lacked inside toilets and bathrooms. They did not have central heating and were heated mostly by coal fires. Their inner city locations were often dirty and there was nowhere for children to play as they rarely had gardens.
‘New’ Towns

To improve standards of living, the government moved people away from the terraced houses into new council accommodation in the countryside. ‘New’ towns were created like Skelmersdale, and existing places were developed, like Runcorn and Winsford. Some high rise blocks were built also.

Bright New Day

Mrs Johnstone’s family is certainly helped by their move, although not as much as she had hoped.

In many ways, it is already too late for the older children, and the unemployment situation was often worse away from the city.

Also, many missed the people and the amenities that they had known before, and the support network that existed all but vanished. Uprooting people can cause stress and depression.

Willy Russell’s Aim

One of the playwright’s aims is to show us that there are disadvantages to being poor and working class. The failure to succeed in life is not because of a lack of ability, but a lack of opportunity. This can clearly be seen in Edward and Mickey. We must ask ourselves whether this is still true in the 21st century.
Synopsis of the play

Write a synopsis of the play

Act one

Act two
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Mrs Johnstone

Appearance:

Key events in the play that link to Mrs Johnstone:

Important quotes which tell us about Mrs Johnstone and her character:

What other people think of Mrs Johnstone:

Important themes that Mrs Johnstone links to:
Mrs Lyons

Appearance:

Key events in the play that link to Mrs Lyons:

Important quotes which tell us about Mrs Lyons and her character:

What other people think of Mrs Lyons:

Important themes that Mrs Lyons links to:
**Mickey**

**Appearance:**

**Key events in the play that link to Mickey:**

**Important quotes which tell us about Mickey and his character:**

**What other people think of Mickey:**

**Important themes that Mickey links to:**
Edward

Appearance:

Key events in the play that link to Edward:

Important quotes which tell us about Edward and his character:

What other people think of Edward:

Important themes that Edward links to:
Linda

Appearance:

Key events in the play that link to Linda:

Important quotes which tell us about Linda and her character:

What other people think of Linda:

Important themes that Linda links to:
Sammy

Appearance:

Key events in the play that link to Sammy:

Important quotes which tell us about Sammy and his character:

What other people think of Sammy:

Important themes that Sammy links to:
Narrator

Appearance:

Key events in the play that link to Narrator:

Important quotes which tell us about Narrator and his character:

What other people think of the Narrator:

Important themes that the Narrator links to:
Find the key quotes for the following points in the text.

- Narrator’s description on Mrs Johnstone 5
- Description of Mrs Johnstone 5/6
- Mrs Johnstone being poor 6/7
- Mrs Lyons wants children 8
- Mrs Johnstone on superstition 9
- Mrs Johnstone worries about having two new babies 11
- Mrs Lyons asks for a baby 11/12
- Mrs Johnstone is persuaded by Mrs Lyons 13/14
- Mrs Lyons takes the baby 18
- Mrs Lyons wants Mrs Johnstone to leave 21
- Mrs Johnstone wants to take the baby 22
- Mrs Lyons threatens Mrs Johnstone if she tells someone about the pact 23
• Narrator on superstition 23

• Mickey looks up to Sammy 26/27

• Mickey and Edward meet 27/28/29

• Mickey and Edward become Blood Brothers 30/31

• Sammy’s description of Edward 31

• Mrs Johnstone meets Edward 32/33

• Mrs Lyons won’t let Edward play with Mickey 35/36

• Linda is introduced to Edward 42

• Linda and Mickey tell Edward what to say to the policeman 43

• Mrs Lyons worries about Edward 45

• Mrs Johnstone gives Eddie a locket 50

• Mickey describes Eddie 53

• Eddie describes Mickey 53/54
- The Johnstones move away 56/57
- Linda loves Mickey 67/68
- Mickey loves Linda 71
- Mickey and Eddie are reunited 73
- Edward gives Mickey advice about flirting with Linda 74
- Mrs Lyons confronts Mrs Johnstone 77/78/79
- Narrator describes Mickey, Linda and Eddie growing up 82/83
- Edward leave for university 86/87
- Linda is pregnant 87
- Mickey and Linda get married 89
- Mickey loses his job 91/92
- Mickey agrees to help Sammy 93/94
- Mrs Johnstone explains what happened to Mickey 97
- Mickey starts taking pills 97/98
- Linda hides Mickey’s tablets 99/100
- Narrator describes Mickey 103/104
- Mickey threatens to kill Eddie 105/106
- Mrs Johnstone tells Edward and Mickey they are brothers 106
- Narrator questions the audience 107
- Mrs Johnstone is upset by Edward and Mickey’s death 107/108
Themes in Blood Brothers

Task: Identify the key themes highlighted in Blood Brothers:

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Complete the mind map on the following page to show the themes from Blood Brothers.

You should try to include:

• Key quotes
• Characters
• Events
Themes in Blood Brothers
Practise Exam Questions

How far does Russell present Mickey as a likeable character?

Write about:
• what Mickey says and does in the play
• how far Russell presents Mickey as likeable.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

How does Russell suggest that what happens to Mickey and Edward throughout the play is unavoidable?

Write about:
• what happens to Mickey and Edward
• how Russell presents what happens to Mickey and Edward as unavoidable.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

How does Russell use the characters of Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons in Blood Brothers to explore ideas about class?

Write about:
• how Russell presents Mrs Johnstone and Mrs Lyons
• how Russell uses these characters to explore ideas about class.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]

How does Willy Russell present childhood and growing up in Blood Brothers?

Write about:
• the ways particular characters change as they grow up
• how Russell presents childhood and growing up by the ways he writes.

[30 marks]
AO4 [4 marks]