

Blood Brothers

by Willy Russell · Language: EN

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Overview

Blood Brothers is a play by Willy Russell that tells the tragic story of twin brothers, Mickey and Edward, who are separated at birth and raised in vastly different social circumstances. Mrs. Johnstone, a poor, working-class mother, already has several children and is struggling to cope when she discovers she is pregnant with twins. Her employer, Mrs. Lyons, who is childless and desperate for a baby, persuades her to give one of the twins to her, and the two women agree that the boys will never know of each other's existence. The play follows the boys from childhood to adulthood, as their lives intertwine despite the social barriers that separate them. They become close friends, unaware of their blood connection, and both fall in love with the same girl, Linda, which sets the stage for a tragic and inevitable conclusion.

The play is a modern morality tale that explores themes of nature versus nurture, social class, and the destructive power of superstition and secrets. Russell uses the structure of a Greek tragedy, with a narrator who foreshadows the boys' deaths from the very beginning, creating a sense of impending doom. The story is set in Liverpool and spans several decades, from the 1960s to the 1980s, highlighting the economic and social changes that affect the characters' lives. The central argument is that social class and environment, rather than innate ability or character, determine a person's fate, and that the rigid class system in Britain is both unjust and destructive.

Blood Brothers is significant because it is one of the most popular and enduring works of British theatre, often studied in schools and performed in theatres worldwide. Its powerful emotional impact, memorable songs, and universal themes of friendship, love, and loss resonate with audiences of all ages. The play challenges audiences to consider the consequences of inequality and the ways in which society can shape or break individuals. It remains a relevant and moving exploration of the human condition, and its tragic ending continues to provoke discussion about fate, choice, and the bonds of family.

Key Takeaways

- Social class and environment can have a profound impact on a person's life chances, often outweighing innate abilities or character.
- Secrets and lies, even when well-intentioned, can have devastating consequences for everyone involved.

- The bond between siblings is powerful and can transcend social barriers, but it can also be tragically twisted by circumstance.
- Superstition and fear can drive people to make irrational decisions that lead to tragedy.
- Friendship and love can be tested and destroyed by the pressures of social inequality and economic hardship.
- The play uses the structure of a Greek tragedy to emphasize the inevitability of the twins' fate, suggesting that society's rigid class system makes such outcomes almost unavoidable.
- The narrator's role highlights the theme of fate versus free will, as he constantly reminds the audience of the tragic ending.
- The character of Mrs. Johnstone represents the resilience and love of a working-class mother, but also the limitations imposed on her by poverty.

Chapter Summaries

Act One

The play opens with the narrator setting the scene, describing the deaths of Mickey and Edward. The story then flashes back to the 1960s, introducing Mrs. Johnstone, a poor mother of seven, who is pregnant with twins. She works as a cleaner for Mrs. Lyons, a wealthy but childless woman. Mrs. Lyons convinces Mrs. Johnstone to give her one of the twins, claiming that it will be better for the child. The boys are born, and Mrs. Johnstone reluctantly gives one to Mrs. Lyons, who names him Edward. The two families live in different parts of Liverpool, and the boys grow up unaware of each other. However, they meet by chance as children and become close friends, despite their different backgrounds. They even invent a game called 'Blood Brothers,' where they cut their hands and mix their blood, vowing to be brothers forever.

Act Two

The second act jumps forward in time to the 1970s and 1980s. Mickey and Edward are now teenagers, and their friendship continues, but the differences in their lives become more pronounced. Edward is educated at a private school and has a bright future, while Mickey struggles in a failing state school and faces unemployment. Both boys fall in love with Linda, Mickey's childhood sweetheart. Edward, who is more confident and articulate, also develops feelings for Linda, creating a love triangle. Mrs. Lyons, who has become increasingly paranoid and superstitious, tries to keep Edward away from Mickey, fearing that the truth will come out. The act ends with Mickey and Linda getting married, while Edward goes off to university, setting the stage for the tragic events to come.

Act Three

The final act takes place in the 1980s. Mickey is unemployed, depressed, and struggling to support his family. He becomes involved in a robbery, which goes wrong, and he ends up in

prison. While Mickey is in prison, Edward and Linda grow close, and Linda begins to have feelings for Edward. When Mickey is released, he discovers the affair and is consumed by jealousy and rage. He confronts Edward, and in a moment of madness, he pulls out a gun. The narrator's prophecy is fulfilled as the twins die, one shot by the other, and the other killed by the police. The play ends with the tragic realization of their true relationship, as Mrs. Johnstone and Mrs. Lyons mourn over the bodies of their sons.

Themes

- Nature vs. nurture
- Social class inequality
- Fate and free will
- Superstition and fear
- Friendship and loyalty
- Motherhood and sacrifice

Notable Quotes

- "There's no use crying, there's no use pleading. For the devil's got your number, and he's already reading." — The narrator sings this at the beginning of the play, setting the tone of inevitability and doom.
- "I was born on the 18th of July, 1960, and I was born on the 18th of July, 1960." — Mickey and Edward say this together as children, discovering they share the same birthday, a key moment in their friendship.
- "We were born on the same day, and we'll die on the same day." — Mickey says this to Edward during their childhood, unknowingly foreshadowing their tragic fate.
- "The devil's got your number, boy." — The narrator repeats this line throughout the play, emphasizing the theme of fate and the inescapable tragedy.
- "I'm not a bad kid, I'm just a bit of a handful." — Mickey says this to his mother when he is young, showing his vulnerability and the way he is perceived by others.
- "You're a pair of bloody brothers, you are." — Linda says this to Mickey and Edward when they are children, highlighting their close bond.
- "It's a bloody game, isn't it?" — Mickey says this to Edward during their childhood, referring to their 'Blood Brothers' pact, but also reflecting on the randomness of life.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Blood Brothers about?

Blood Brothers is a play about twin brothers separated at birth and raised in different social classes. Mickey grows up in poverty, Edward in wealth. They become friends despite their differences, but their lives take tragic turns, leading to a devastating conclusion. It explores themes of fate, class, and the bonds of family.

Is Blood Brothers worth reading?

Yes, Blood Brothers is a powerful and emotionally gripping play that is widely studied and performed. It offers deep insights into social issues, character development, and the use of dramatic irony. The story is engaging and thought-provoking, making it a rewarding read for students and theatre enthusiasts alike.

How does Blood Brothers end?

Spoiler: Mickey, unemployed and jealous after discovering his wife Linda's affair with Edward, confronts Edward with a gun. In a moment of despair, Mickey shoots Edward, and then the police shoot Mickey. Both twins die, and their mothers reveal the truth of their brotherhood, leaving the families devastated.

Who should read Blood Brothers?

Blood Brothers is ideal for students studying English literature or drama, as it is a set text in many schools. It also appeals to anyone interested in social commentary, tragic narratives, and the exploration of class and identity. Theatre lovers will appreciate its musical elements and dramatic structure.

How long does it take to read Blood Brothers?

Blood Brothers is a short play, typically around 100 pages. At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it takes about 2 to 3 hours to read. However, the time may vary depending on how closely you study the text and its stage directions.