



Year 9 Knowledge Organiser: Willy Russell – Blood Brothers

WHO
 Willy Russell was born in Liverpool in 1947, to a working class family; his father worked in a factory and his mother was a nurse. he left school at 15 and became a women’s hairdresser, before returning to education age 20 and eventually becoming a teacher.
 Willy Russell continues to be one of the most celebrated and widely produced writers of his generation with works regularly being produced throughout the world as well as in the UK.

WHAT
 The first play Russell wrote was Keep Your Eyes Down (1971) and performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1971. In 1974 Russell wrote John, Paul, George, Ringo and Bert, a musical about The Beatles, winning the Evening Standard and London Theatre Critics awards for the best musical of 1974.

Alongside further stage works, One for the Road (1976)and Stags and Hens (1978). Commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, Educating Rita premiered at the Warehouse, London in 1980 and transferred to the West End. In 1986.

Russell wrote Shirley Valentine which went on to an acclaimed West End and Broadway run. Both Shirley Valentine and Educating Rita became feature films with Michael Caine, Julie Walters and Pauline Collins all receiving Oscar nominations for their respective roles, as did Russell for his Educating Rita screenplay.

Russell's other worldwide theatrical success has been Blood Brothers, about a pair of twins separated at birth and brought up in completely different environments.

THEMES AND ISSUES

CLASS	NATURE v’s NURTURE	FATE
VIOLENCE	SUPERSTITION	

BLOOD BROTHERS – PLOT
 Deserted by her husband, Mrs Johnstone already has five children and is expecting twins. She cleans house for childless Mrs Lyons who offers unofficially to adopt one of the babies.
 Mrs Johnstone reluctantly agrees; she knows that the child will be well brought up in a rich household. But, there is a prophesy that twins parted at birth will die when they discover the truth, and both mothers do their best to keep the twins, Mickey and Edward, separated.

The situation becomes harder for both women when Mickey and Edward meet while playing in the street and when an immediate bond is formed. They become "blood brothers".
 Distraught Mrs Lyons moves to the country. Soon after, Mrs Johnstone is rehoused nearby and the boys meet again and fall in love with the same girl, Linda.

But as Edward goes on to higher education, Mickey must take a boring job as Linda is pregnant. After marrying Linda he loses his job. He turns to crime but gets caught and sent to jail. On his release he becomes dependent on tranquillisers. Linda turns to Edward, now a councillor, for help. Edward gets Mickey a job - and a house. Mrs Lyons tells Mickey that Edward is having an affair with Linda and Mickey goes after Edward with a gun. He finds him at a meeting but cannot shoot him - until Mrs Johnstone bursts in and tells them the truth – that she gave Edward, his twin, away.

Mickey kills Edward and in turn is shot by the police.

DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS

PROLOGUE – A separate, introductory section of a play.

DRAMATIC IRONY – When the audience know something that the characters on stage don’t.

MULTI ROLE – PLAY – When one actor plays a range of roles in a performance.

NON-NATURALISTIC – A performance that does not look like real life. It may include a range of dramatic techniques such as tableaux, narration, thought tracking or song + dance.

BRECHTIAN - A performance in the style of Bertolt Brecht – a drama practitioner who believed that the audience should be made to think as well as feel.

COMIC RELIEF – A break from sad events in a play – creates a humorous response from the audience.

ENSEMBLE – A group of actors who perform together for a more theatrical impact.

NARRATOR - A character who directly addresses the audience with new information, tells us that time has passed, or gives opinions.

FORESHADOWING– The play begins with what happens at the end.