

Macbeth KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context – The play was written by William Shakespeare, and was first performed around 1606

Shakespeare's Time – Shakespeare wrote at the time of two monarchs: Queen Elizabeth I and James I. The plays that he wrote during the period of Queen Elizabeth are generally happy and joyful, reflecting the mood at the time. However, darker plays such as Macbeth were written in the era of James I, which was far more unstable. For example, the gunpowder plot was the year before.



James I – 1606 was early in the reign of James I, who was an admirer of Shakespeare's plays, and a patron of his acting company. It is doubtless, therefore, that Shakespeare had the king in mind when writing a play about Macbeth, a figure from Scottish ancestry. Furthermore, King James's family claimed to have descended from a historical figure named Banquo.



The Divine Right of Kings – Divine Right asserts that monarchs were appointed from God above, and that any attempt to question them was to question God himself. This was a widely-held view at the time. King James I often quoted divine right to cement his place on the throne. A play involving a good, 'God-given' king, and the demise of a king-slayer would no doubt have gone down well with King James at the time.



The Role of Women – Despite the strength of Elizabeth I's reign, society at the time was patriarchal – women were considered inferior to men. Women belonged to their fathers (or brothers if their fathers had died) and then their husbands. They were not permitted to own land or enter most professions. They were instead expected to bear children, and be gentle and womanly. Lady Macbeth would therefore be at odds with what was expected of women.



Witches and the Supernatural – At the time of Shakespeare, the belief in witches and the supernatural was extremely strong, and many so-called 'witches' were burnt at the stake. There is no doubt, therefore, that some of the ideas in the play would have been taken very seriously, such as the witches' prophecies, Macbeth being seemingly 'possessed' and his vivid hallucinations.



Healthcare and Medicine – Healthcare and medicine were not as advanced in Shakespeare's age as they are today – there were numerous ailments and diseases that were not yet understood. Furthermore, there were a many wars in which scores of men were killed. Therefore, death was a much more frequent thought for people at the time. The high death count in the play would therefore seem slightly more ordinary!



Main Characters – Consider what Shakespeare intended through his characterisation of each of the below...

Macbeth – Macbeth is the lead protagonist of the play. He is introduced as a Scottish general who is thought to be a brave and strong soldier. However, he is easily persuaded to commit the murder of a king that he loves. He becomes a tyrannical and destructive king, who responds to all threats (including his own insecurities) through violence and murder.

Lady Macbeth – Macbeth's wife, an extremely ambitious woman who lusts for power. At the beginning of the play, she seems stronger than Macbeth, urging and aiding him to kill Duncan. Later in the play, however, she becomes racked with guilt and madness, proving unable to come to terms with what they have done. Her conscience affects her to such a degree that she eventually commits suicide.

Duncan – Duncan is the kind and loved King of Scotland who Macbeth murders in order to fulfil his ambition and the witches' prophecy. Duncan is a virtuous King, who is both compassionate and rational – he forms a stark contrast with Macbeth as king. When Duncan dies, order in Scotland is shattered. It is only restored when his son, Malcolm eventually takes the throne.

Macduff – A Scottish nobleman who is dubious and hostile towards Macbeth's reign from the beginning. His wife and young son are murdered by Macbeth. Macduff leads the battle against Macbeth's tyrannical reign, eventually becoming the man who kills Macbeth (in line with the witch's prophecy as he was not of 'woman born.') In doing so, he helps Malcolm to the throne.

The Three Witches – The witches represent trickery, manipulation and the supernatural. They use charms, spells and prophecies to prompt Macbeth into murdering Duncan. There is some ambivalence over how much of their power comes from supernatural abilities, as opposed to knowing the weaknesses of their victim. In any case, they take pleasure in toying with human lives and emotions.

Banquo – Banquo is a brave and noble gentleman who is a friend and fellow soldier to Macbeth. Banquo is also given prophecies by the witches, but unlike Macbeth, he chooses not to act on them. After being murdered, Banquo's ghost returns to haunt Macbeth, causing him a great deal of fright, and reminding him of the path he chose not to take. In accordance with the witches' prophecies, Banquo's descendants later take their place on the throne.

First Scene: Act I Scene I **Final Scene:** Act IV Scene I

First Scene: Act I Scene III **Final Scene:** Act III Scene IV

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Unchecked Ambition – The tale of Macbeth ruthlessly exposes the dangers of ambition when it is not held by moral constraints. Ambition turns Macbeth from a brave and loyal Scottish general into a murderous tyrant. Lady Macbeth is another example of this theme, as she is unable to deal with the acts that she and Macbeth have committed to fuel their ambition, and so commits suicide.



Fate vs Free Will – Throughout the play, the audience is frequently forced to question the notion of fate vs free will – does the story pan out the way that it does because it was pre-ordained, or because of the actions that Macbeth chose to take? Macbeth fervently attempts to fight the negative aspects of his fate, and yet it is these very actions (his free will) that cause the predetermined downfall (fate).

Gender, Masculinity and Femininity – Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband by questioning his masculinity, as he originally declines to murder King Duncan for the throne. She states that she wishes she could be 'unsexed' so as to give her bravery to commit the deed. Masculinity is frequently associated with raw aggression, and femininity with weakness and kindness.



Inversion of the Natural Order – Wherever the natural order is disturbed in Macbeth (the three supernatural witches, the murder of a king) disorder and chaos soon follow. There is only peace when the natural order is restored (Malcolm is seated on the throne). In line with the beliefs of King James, through Macbeth Shakespeare expresses that the inversion of the natural order is dangerous and destructive.

Scene-by-Scene Summary – Take note of the key quotations from each scene.

Act 1 Scene 1	Three witches meet on a heath. They plot to trick Macbeth at a later time.	<i>Fair is foul and foul is fair, Hover through the fog and filthy air.</i>
Act 1 Scene 2	King Duncan is told of Macbeth's bravery in battle. He tells a messenger to award him Thane of Cawdor.	<i>No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive... ...And with his former title greet Macbeth.</i>
Act 1 Scene 3	The witches confront Macbeth and Banquo and deliver their prophecies. The messenger arrives to tell Macbeth that he is the Thane of Cawdor.	<i>All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis! All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor! All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!</i>
Act 1 Scene 4	At the Kings' Palace, Duncan names Malcolm (his eldest son) as his successor.	<i>The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap.</i>
Act 1 Scene 5	At Macbeth's castle, Lady Macbeth receives a letter from Macbeth detailing the witches' prophecies. She plans Duncan's murder, but fears that Macbeth is too kind to fulfil his ambition.	<i>You spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty.</i>
Act 1 Scene 6	Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle. He professes his love for Macbeth as a dear friend.	<i>Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly, And shall continue our graces towards him.</i>
Act 1 Scene 7	Macbeth has doubts about the assassination. Lady Macbeth tells him of the plot and he then agrees to it.	<i>If it were done when 'tis done, than 'twere well It were done quickly...</i>
Act 2 Scene 1	Banquo and Fleance arrive. When they depart to bed, Macbeth sees a vision of a dagger leading him towards Duncan's chamber.	<i>Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.</i>
Act 2 Scene 2	Macbeth emerges from the chamber, visibly shaken. He has forgotten to place the daggers with the chamberlains to absolve the blame. Lady Macbeth must return them.	<i>Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand? Sleep no more, / Macbeth does murder sleep</i>
Act 2 Scene 3	Macduff arrives and finds Duncan dead. Macbeth explains that he killed the chamberlains in rage. Duncan's sons flee.	<i>O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart Cannot conceive nor name thee!</i>
Act 2 Scene 4	Macduff tells Ross, a thane, that Macbeth has been named King.	<i>The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.</i>
Act 3 Scene 1	Macbeth, fearing the witches' prophecies about Banquo's descendants sitting on the throne, arranges to have Banquo and Fleance killed.	<i>It is concluded. Banquo, thy soul's flight, If it find heaven, must find it out to-night.</i>
Act 3 Scenes 2-3	Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth of his plan to kill Banquo. Elsewhere, the murderers kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes.	<i>O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly! Thou mayst revenge. O slave!</i>
Act 3 Scene 4	Macbeth holds a banquet. He sees the ghost of Banquo and becomes hysterical. The guests are eventually asked to leave by Lady Macbeth.	<i>I pray you, speak not; he grows worse and worse; Question enrages him. At once, good night.</i>
Act 3 Scenes 5-6	The witches are scolded by Hecate for their meddling. Elsewhere, Lennox tells of Macduff gathering an army to fight Macbeth.	<i>May soon return to this our suffering country Under a hand accursed!</i>
Act 4 Scene 1	Macbeth again visits the witches, and through terrible apparitions is given several new prophecies regarding his fate. The witches then vanish.	<i>Beware Macduff... none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth... Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill Shall come against him.</i>
Act 4 Scenes 2-3	Macduff's wife and children are murdered by Macbeth's assassins. Macduff and Malcolm unite in order to fight Macbeth.	<i>Macbeth's ripe for shaking, and the powers above Put on their instruments.</i>
Act 5 Scene 1	A doctor and gentlewoman watch Lady Macbeth sleepwalk. She talks of the murders of Duncan and Banquo, and imagines stubborn blood on her hands.	<i>Out, damned spot! out, I say! ... Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?</i>
Act 5 Scene 2	Lords discuss how the rebel army will gather at Birnam Wood.	<i>Make us our march towards Birnam.</i>
Act 5 Scenes 3-4	Inside, Macbeth boasts that none of woman born can harm him. Macduff and co gather at Birnam Wood.	<i>I will not be afraid of death and bone, Till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane.</i>
Act 5 Scene 5	A scream is heard at Macbeth's castle. It is announced that Lady Macbeth is dead (suicide). Macbeth reacts numbly. A messenger reveals that the trees of Birnam Wood are advancing.	<i>Life is 'a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing'</i>
Act 5 Scenes 6-7	The battle begins. Macbeth fights without fear, as he believes no man born of woman can harm him. The castle is breached.	<i>But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn, Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born.</i>
Act 5 Scene 8	Macbeth and Macduff finally meet. Macduff reveals that he was born by caesarean section (not 'by woman born.') He kills Macbeth. Malcolm is proclaimed King.	<i>Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb Untimely ripp'd. Hail, King of Scotland!</i>

Dramatic Devices in Macbeth














Dramatic Irony	<i>'t is a peerless kinsman.</i> Duncan trusts Macbeth. The audience knows that Macbeth is plotting Duncan's murder.	Tragic Hero – A main character cursed by fate and possessed of a tragic flaw (Macbeth).
Soliloquy	<i>This supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good.</i> Macbeth's soliloquy reveals his inner torment.	Hamartia – The fatal character flaw of the tragic hero (ambition).
Aside	<i>The Prince of Cumberland, that is a step that I must fall down.</i> Macbeth reveals his ambition through an aside.	Catharsis – The release of the audience's emotions through empathy with the characters.
Rhyming Couplets	<i>Away and mock the time, with fairest show/ False face must hide what the heart doth know.</i>	Internal Conflict – The struggle the hero engages in with his/her fatal flaw.

Key Vocabulary: Ambition, regicide, antithesis, malevolent, patriarchal, femininity, deceitful, masculinity, hubris, hamartia, usurp, heinous, treachery, mercurial



A Christmas Carol

KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context – A Christmas Carol was written by Charles Dickens in 1843	
<p>Charles Dickens – Charles Dickens was born in 1812 and spent the first years of his life in Kent, England. At 9, he moved to London. At 12, his father was sent to debtors' prison for racking up huge debts, and Charles was given a painful job labelling bottles near the prison. He found this period in his life hellish, and it doubtlessly led him to draw readers' attention to the plight of the poor when he later found success as an author. Many of his works are about social hardships and inequalities.</p> 	<p>Class Divides – Despite industrial changes altering the social landscape, there were still relatively distinct social classes in operation: the nobility upper class, the middle class, and the working class. Life was terrible for the poorest. Lack of money resulted in a negligible food supply. For some working families, money was so tight that they required their children to work in order to survive.</p> 
<p>The Victorian Era – The Victorian era describes the period in which Queen Victoria sat on the English throne – between 1837 and 1901 (most of Dickens' life). Whilst this was a time of industrial revolution, it was also an extremely harsh time to live, and the differences between the lives of the richest and the poorest were exacerbated. The Victorian era was a period of great change. In this time, the population of England doubled – from 16.8 million 1851 to over 30 million in 1901.</p> 	<p>Health and Medicine – Healthcare was more of a luxury at the time, and medicine was nowhere near as advanced today. Many diseases were rife, and childbirth and poverty were very real dangers to people living in the era. As a result, a middle class person may expect to live to 45 at the time, whereas a working class person would have been lucky to have lived half that time. In <i>A Christmas Carol</i>, the restrictions in healthcare are evident in Tiny Tim's continued suffering.</p> 
<p>Workhouses – A workhouse was a place where a person went if they could not afford to financially support themselves and their families. Men, women and children (mostly orphans) lived and worked in the workhouses, which were very crowded – making living conditions unhealthy and unpleasant. People slept in dormitories, where disease was easily spread. In <i>A Christmas Carol</i>, Scrooge voices his support for workhouses.</p> 	<p>Christmas – We now associate Christmas as being a time of seasonal goodwill, love and friendship. However, before the Victorian era, when writers such as Dickens spread these messages through their novels, there was no Santa Claus, Christmas cards, and no holidays from work! Christmas Day was a far more low-key affair. Writers such as Dickens encouraged middle-class families to share their wealth and act selflessly.</p> 
Main Characters – Consider what Dickens intended through his characterisation of each of the below...	
<p>Ebenezer Scrooge – Scrooge is the lead protagonist of the novella. He is a miserly owner of a counting house (what would now be called an accountant's office). Initially greedy, selfish and cold, Scrooge hates Christmas and lacks any form of Christmas spirit. He experiences a moral and psychological transformation through his visits from the Ghosts of Christmases Past, Present and Yet to Come.</p> <p>Quote: "It's enough for a man to understand his own business"</p>	<p>The Cratchits – Bob Cratchit is Scrooge's kind, mild-mannered clerk, who is treated terribly by his employer. He is a very poor man, with a large family, including Tiny Tim. Tiny Tim is a young boy who has been born with physical disabilities that his family are too poor to have treated. Despite these hardships, the family are cheery and determined to enjoy the few positives that they can get from life.</p> <p>Quote: "I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim"</p>
<p>Jacob Marley and Fred – Joseph Marley is Scrooge's late business partner, and Fred is Scrooge's nephew. They represent the two extremes of Christmas spirit. Joseph Marley symbolises the limitations of a life-lived focused on greed and selfishness, whilst Fred's life appears fulfilled through his perpetual joy, kindness and interactions with others. After his death, Joseph Marley has been condemned to wander the world as a miserable ghost.</p> <p>Quote: "you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate."</p>	<p>The Ghost of Christmas Past – This is the first spirit to visit Scrooge. He is a curious child-like figure that has an illuminated head, symbolising how shining a light on memories from the past can be used to illuminate one's thoughts and behaviours in the future. The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge to a number of places from his childhood and early adulthood, including his old school, hometown, and the scene of his engagement being broken off.</p> <p>Quote: "Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!"</p>
<p>The Ghost of Christmas Present – The Ghost of Christmas Present is the second of the three ghosts to visit Scrooge. He is a majestic jolly giant, who is dressed in a green robe. His lifespan is restricted to Christmas Day, and he has 'over 1800 brothers', representative of the other Christmas Days that were once in the present. He escorts Scrooge on a tour of how his contemporaries spend Christmas day, to force him to contemplate his own solitary existence. He also shows him the need to consider 'Want' and 'Ignorance.'</p> <p>Old Major Quote: "Come in! and know me better, man!"</p>	<p>The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come – The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is the third and final spirit to visit Scrooge. He is a silent phantom that is clad in robes (he rather resembles common characterisations of 'Death'). He presents Scrooge with an ominous view of his own death: the only people who his death remotely affects are those he owes money to (who are relieved), those who can make money from him (such as those dealing with his estate) and those who he could have saved (Tiny Tim).</p> <p>Quote: "The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand."</p>
Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.	
<p>Greed and Selfishness – Characters such as Scrooge represent the selfish middle classes, who sought to amass, rather than share their wealth. Jacob Marley demonstrates the burden that such a selfish life will inevitably bring. Through these characters and the events of the novel, Dickens criticises how wealth had become associated with the root of happiness, at the expense of close relationships and goodwill.</p>	
<p>Divisions – Divisions are evident throughout the novel, as those with power and money seek simply to exert and recycle their advantages over those without (rather than aiding them). The book shines a light on the plight faced by poor families such as the Cratchits, which demonises the negative attitudes towards the poor held by the rich.</p> 	
<p>Transformation – Physical transformations are evident throughout <i>A Christmas Carol</i>, as objects, settings, and characters appear and vanish under the manipulation of the ghosts. Spiritual transformations take place too, as the reader witnesses a lonely boy's transformation into an embittered old man, and the efforts made to transform his character to reconnect with those around him.</p>	
<p>Time – Time is stretched by the ghosts – the events that Scrooge experiences appear to have taken days, and yet all takes place in the space of one night. A race against time is also taking place, as the spirits work to prevent Scrooge (and in turn, Tiny Tim) from experiencing their fateful demise. The reader is taught to value the time that we have, and use it to spread happiness to others.</p> 	
Scene-by-Scene Summary – Alongside key quotations from each scene.	
STAVE ONE	<p>It is a foggy Christmas Eve, and Scrooge is working in his counting house. He refuses to buy another lump of coal to heat Bob Cratchit's (his clerk's) office. Scrooge's cheerful nephew, Fred, enters, inviting Scrooge to Christmas party, but he declines. After he leaves, two gentlemen enter, asking if Scrooge is willing to make a charitable donation to the poor. Scrooge again declines. He begrudgingly gives Bob Cratchit the day off. Scrooge follows his usual routine on the way home. At home, he sees the ghost of his old business partner (Jacob Marley) in the knocker. Marley is in chains as punishment for his selfishness and greed when living. He says that he feels to save Scrooge from the same fate, and hence Scrooge will be visited by 3 ghosts over the next 3 nights.</p> <p><i>"Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it."</i></p> 
STAVE TWO	<p>Scrooge is confused to wake at midnight, as it was after 2am when he went to sleep. At one o'clock, Scrooge is visited by a strange child-like figure that emanates wisdom – The Ghost of Christmas Past. The spirit touches Scrooge's heart, granting the power to fly. The ghost takes Scrooge back to where he was raised – Scrooge is touched by memories of his childhood. He sees himself as a schoolboy spending Christmas alone, being visited by his sister, being at a party held by Scrooge's old boss Fezziwig, and with his old partner Belle, who is breaking off their engagement on account of his greed. He sees Belle in a more modern time, with her husband, discussing how Scrooge is now 'quite alone in the world.' Scrooge is upset by the visions, and begs with the ghost to take him back home. Scrooge finds himself back in his bedroom, where he once again falls asleep almost instantly.</p> <p><i>"But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible: and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm."</i></p> 
STAVE THREE	<p>The bell strikes one, and Scrooge is awake once more. At fifteen minutes past one, he wanders into the next room, where he finds the Ghost of Christmas Present waiting for him. He is a majestic jolly giant, and sits atop of a mountain of food. The spirit takes Scrooge to the bustling streets on Christmas morning, where passers-by joyfully greet each other. The spirit then takes Scrooge to the home of Bob Cratchit, where the family savour the Christmas that they can afford. Their visibly-ill son, Tiny Tim, is cheering despite his ailments. Scrooge begs to know whether he will survive. They also visit Fred's Christmas party, which Scrooge enjoys (though no one can see him). Eventually, Scrooge is brought to a vast expanse, where two sickly children, 'Want' and 'Ignorance' emerge. When Scrooge asks if there is anything that can be done, the spirit mocks his prior selfishness.</p> <p><i>"Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air."</i></p> 
STAVE FOUR	<p>Scrooge is approached by a hooded phantom. The spirit is silent, and Scrooge is terrified by him. Scrooge pleads with him to provide his next lesson. The ghost takes him to the stock exchange, where men discuss the accounts of a rich man, a dingy pawn shop, where the rich man's stolen goods are being sold, and the Cratchit household, where the family struggles with the death of Tiny Tim. Scrooge is then taken to a freshly dug grave in a graveyard. The gravestone reveals that it is his own grave. Appalled, Scrooge begs with the spirit to give him another chance to show that he has learnt his lesson. The phantom begins to tremble and disappears, and once again Scrooge finds himself in the relative safety of his own bed.</p> <p><i>I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart"</i></p> 
STAVE FIVE	<p>Scrooge realises that he has been returned to Christmas morning, and is utterly overjoyed. He pays the first boy that he meets a huge sum to deliver a great big turkey to Bob Cratchit's household. He bumps into the gentlemen collecting for charity, apologises for his prior behaviour, and promises to donate lots of money to the poor. He attends Fred's party and is so happy and kind that the other guests can barely believe his behaviour. The next morning, he pretends to scold Bob Cratchit for arriving late, before promising to give him a large raise and to care for his family. As time passes by, he stays true to his word – he helps the Cratchits and becomes like a second father to Tiny Tim, who does not die. Scrooge brings Christmas cheer to every day, and shrugs off the doubts that others have about his changed behaviour. The narrator concludes by suggesting that Scrooge's changed attitude and behaviour should be shared by everyone.</p> <p><i>"He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge...God bless us all, every one!"</i></p> 
Dickens' Literary Devices	
Simile	This gives the reader a better image of characters and places, e.g. Scrooge described as 'hard and sharp as a flint.'
Clear Narrative Viewpoint	The narrator gives views to tell the reader how to think – e.g. Scrooge was a 'tight-fisted hand at the grindstone.'
Metaphor	Used to represent deeper meanings and ideas. For example, the children 'Want' and 'Ignorance' represent the poor in society.
Personification	To emphasise the atmosphere of places and settings: e.g. 'the crisp air laughed to hear it.'
Structural Features	
Five Staves	The story is set out in five Staves – a structure that mimics musical organization – the opening sets the scene, the middle is the turning point, and the last stave concludes.
Surface Level Story	A literal story that works on a surface level, e.g. The story of one cruel and harsh man being visited by ghosts who teach him a lesson, making him kind and compassionate.
Symbolic Level Story	A deeper, more hidden meaning to the story, e.g. There exists a selfish society, who needs to heed this warning, in order to become more caring.
The Number 3	Scrooge is visited by 3 ghosts: Past, Present, and Yet to Come. This is a common feature in magical fairy stories: e.g. 3 wishes, 3 choices etc. This adds to the mystical feel of the novella.

BLOOD BROTHERS KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context – Blood Brothers was written by Willy Russell, and was first staged in 1983.

Willy Russell – William Russell (born 23rd August 1947) is an English dramatist, lyricist and composer. Amongst his most popular works are *Educating Rita*, *Shirley Valentine* and *Blood Brothers*. Russell is from Liverpool, and wrote his first play, *Keep Your Eyes Down*, in 1971 whilst he attended the city's St Katherine's College of Higher Education. Two of his plays, *Shirley Valentine* and *Educating Rita*, have become successful feature films.



Influences through Russell's Life – Much of Willy Russell's work is influenced by his own working class background. Russell was a child from a low-income family, with a father who struggled with drug addiction. His father worked in a factory and his mother worked as a nurse. Russell left school at age 15, without any academic qualifications, and became a hairdresser. He did not return to education until age 20. Russell has a love of popular music (one of his earlier plays is about The Beatles) which is evident in most of his plays.



Marilyn Monroe – Marilyn Monroe was an extremely famous Hollywood actress, whose fame transcended the boundaries of her Hollywood films. She was presented in the media as a 'fantasy' woman who lived a perfect life. Yet, the reality was very different – she became addicted to anti-depressants and eventually died from an overdose. From the 1950s onwards, Monroe was just one part star from a society in which everyday people became more influenced by pop/celebrity culture.



Margaret Thatcher – Margaret Thatcher was a Conservative politician who was elected as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1979, four years before *Blood Brothers* was first performed. Seeing British manufacturing as uncompetitive, she blamed trade unions as being too strong in calling strikes on weakened employers. So, she reduced unions' powers and sold off and closed uncompetitive companies.



Effect in the UK/ Liverpool – A short-term effect of companies being closed and sold off was that there was an economic downturn across the UK and unemployment soared. This particularly affected the more industrialised northern areas of the country, with Liverpool being a prime example. Liverpool's docks, a chief source of employment in the city, were allowed to fold, causing thousands of households to fall into poverty and unemployment. Crime levels increased, drug use sky-rocketed, and housing deteriorated in poorer areas.



Thatcher's Values vs. Russell's Values – One of the pivotal beliefs in Thatcher's system was that success and wealth came to those who chose to work hard. In *Blood Brothers*, Russell demonstrates opposition towards that view, suggesting that opportunities are more limited for those that are raised in working class backgrounds, when compared to those from the middle classes. This is divided society is demonstrated through showing the effect of different upbringings on a set of twins.



Main Characters – Consider what Russell intended through his characterisation of each of the below...

Mickey – Mickey is the biological twin of Edward who Mrs Johnstone opts to keep. Mickey has a harsh working-class upbringing, but at his heart he is honest and sincere. He takes a number of knocks in life (that Edward is fortunate enough to avoid) for example impregnating his girlfriend (Linda) and getting laid off from his industrial job. He hardens as the play goes on, becoming cynical after time in prison, and becomes addicted to anti-depressants.

Mickey Quote: "Do you wanna be my blood brother, Eddie?"

The Narrator – All-knowing and slightly menacing, the Narrator takes on a number of roles throughout the play. Sometimes he plays parts (e.g. the Millman) whilst at other times he stands back and comments upon the action as it unfolds. The Narrator reminds the audience of the terrible act that causes the tragedy to unfold, and warns the audience of the tragic events that are to come.

Narrator Quote: "So did y'hear the story of the Johnstone twins?"

Mrs Johnstone – Mrs Johnstone is the biological mother of Mickey and Edward, as well as a number of other children. She is a deeply superstitious woman who has to struggle to get by, however she also has a good heart and a strong sense of right and wrong. She gives up one of her twins as she genuinely believes that she has no choice after being left by her husband. As the play progresses, she is overcome by regret, however she always remains kind and loving.

Mrs Johnstone Quote: "In the name of Jesus, the thing was done."

Edward – Edward is the biological twin of Mickey, who Mrs Johnstone gives to Mrs Lyons to raise as her own. Like Mickey, Edward is honest and sincere, remaining kind and down-to-earth despite his luxury upbringing with the snobbish Mrs Lyons. Unlike Mickey, however, Edward benefits from every advantage in life, such as attending private schools and university. He uses his position as a councilman to help Mickey, but also begins an affair with Linda.

Edward Quote: "It's just a secret, everybody has secrets, don't you have secrets?"

Linda – Linda begins the play as a tomboy who enjoys playing with Mickey and Edward, but she soon becomes an object for their desire. At the beginning of her adolescence, she seems solely attracted to Mickey, telling him that she loves him even before their first kiss. However, after years of poverty (and Mickey's imprisonment) she turns to Edward for comfort and the two begin an affair.

Linda Quote: "You can get up off the ground again"

Mrs Lyons – Mrs Lyons is the opposite of Mrs Johnstone – arrogant, snobbish, and infertile. She adopts Edward and brings him up as a wealthy, middle-class boy. Like Mrs Johnstone, Mrs Lyons is racked with guilt from the deed of separating the twins, but this influences her to create a superstition to keep Mrs Johnstone away. She eventually becomes so unhinged and paranoid that she will lose her son that she attempts to kill Mrs Johnstone.

Mrs Lyons Quote: "Oh...you mean you're superstitious?"

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Class and Money – The themes of class and money are dominant as they both control the actions of characters and significantly impact upon their lives. For example, the catalytic deed – Mrs Johnstone giving one of the twins away – comes about because she simply cannot afford to keep them both. Class then heavily influences the paths that Mickey and Edward then follow.



Fate and Superstition – The voice of fate is provided over and over again throughout the play by the Narrator, who reveals even at the outset that the two will die. Mrs Lyons plays on Mrs Johnstone's belief in superstition in order to keep her away from Edward. However ridiculous and made-up it sounds, it eventually comes to pass, almost as if the false threat is in itself a sin.



Nature vs Nurture – As Mickey and Edward are twins, they are genetically (nature) as similar as can be. Therefore, Russell is suggesting that it is in fact nurture (their upbringing) that causes their contrasting behaviours, actions, and mannerisms. It is clear that Russell feels that unjust society is the heaviest influence in where people end up.



Coming of Age – Although much of the play focuses on dark and complex ideas, one of the lighter themes within the play is the theme of the boys 'coming of age.' Although the play ends tragically, much of it deals with the boys growing up, evolving from young boys, to teenagers, to men. As they mature, their experiences and preoccupations notably shift.



Scene-by-Scene Summary – Alongside key quotations from each section of the play.

Beginning of Act I	The play opens with Mrs Johnstone begging the Narrator to tell her 'it's not true', and the Narrator revealing that the Johnstone twins were separated at birth, and only found out when they died. Mrs Johnstone (a 30-something woman who looks much older) tells of her life having a shotgun wedding, having many children at a young age, and her husband leaving her. Mrs Johnstone cannot pay her bills, and her children are hungry. In the next scene, Mrs Johnstone is seen cleaning for the wealthy Mrs Lyons, who laments not being able to have children. Mrs Johnstone finds out that she is having twins (she cannot afford them both). Mrs Lyons begs her to give one of them to her. Initially, Mrs Johnstone is horrified, but Mrs Lyons is able to convince her. Mrs Lyons plays on Mrs Johnstone's belief in superstition to have her swear on a bible to tell no one. The deal is final.	"So did y' hear the story Of the Johnstone twins? As like each other as two new pins Of one womb born, on the self same day, How one was kept and one given away?"
Middle of Act I	Mrs Johnstone gives birth to twins, and when she returns from hospital creditors take her possessions to pay for bills. Mrs Lyons enters and forces Mrs J to give up the twin, as promised. Reluctantly, she does so. When returning to the house the next week, Mrs J plays with the twin she gave away – Mrs L arrives and is furious – she fires her. Mrs J threatens to take her baby with her, and then to tell someone, but Mrs L makes up a new superstition about twins secretly parted, who learn their origins, immediately die.	"Surely, it's better to give one child to me. Look, at least if the child was with me you'd be able to see him every day, as you came to work."
End of Act I	7 years later, Mickey remarks to his mother that he is sick of his older brother, Sammy, bullying him. By chance, he then meets Edward, and the two instantly become best friends – they realise that they have the same birthday and agree to become 'blood brothers.' When Mickey introduces Edward to his mother, she is alarmed, and sends him home. When Mrs L finds out the two have become friends, she is also incensed. Mickey and Edward decide to play together against their mothers' wishes. With Linda, they play with a toy gun, then throw stones at a window, but are caught by a Policeman. The Policeman acts v. differently to the Johnstones and the Lyons families. The Lyons move to the country. Edward and Mickey both miss each other dearly. Not too long after, Mrs J receives a letter stating that her family is being relocated to the country. She sees it as a fresh start.	"See this means that we're blood brothers an' that we always have to stand by each other. Now you say after me: 'I will always defend my brother. I will always defend my brother.'"
Beginning of Act II	Mrs J sings happily about her new house and life. She pays bills on time. Mickey is now 14 and has begun to notice girls. Meanwhile, Edward now attends boarding school. Mickey now clearly has a crush on Linda. They get on a bus together, which Sammy attempts to rob before being chased away. Linda warns Mickey never to turn bad like Sammy. Meanwhile, Edward is suspended at school for wearing a locket given to him by Mrs J (with a picture of her and Mickey in it) before he left. Mickey and Linda are also suspended from their school for answering back to a teacher. Leaving school, Mickey longs to be able to tell Linda how he feels. He bumps into Edward, and the two recognise one another. They begin to talk about girls, and decide to go and watch a pornographic film together, in order to get some tips. Mrs Lyons watches their whole exchange, and follows them.	"Linda...Linda...Don't...Linda, I wanna kiss y', an' put me arms around y' an' kiss y' and kiss y' an even fornicate with y' but I don't know how to tell y' because I've got pimples an' me feet are too big..."
Middle of Act II	The boys stop at Mrs J's house to get money. She is shocked but happy to see Edward. She gives them money for a movie. Mrs Lyons (now increasingly unstable) confronts Mrs J, offering her large amounts of money to leave the area. Mrs J refuses. Angered, Mrs L tries to stab Mrs J, but Mrs J disarms her. Mrs L is becoming known as a 'mad woman.' Edward and Mickey emerge from the movie, impressed. Linda also emerges, having been at the same movie. Edward, excited, stands on a car, and the three are chased away by a policeman. The three spend a great deal of time together, and we see them grow from 14 to 18. At 18, Mickey now works in a factory, and Edward is going away to University. Although Edward clearly has feelings for Linda, he loyally encourages Mickey to ask her out, which he does. Mickey soon reveals to Mrs J that Linda is pregnant, and that they will marry soon. They get married, but shortly afterwards, Mickey is made redundant from the factory.	"Due to the world situation The shrinking pound, the global slump And the price of oil I'm afraid we must fire you. We no longer require you. It's just another Sign of the times"
End of Act II	Edward returns from university buoyant, however when he meets the depressed and cynical Mickey, the two argue. As they leave one another, Edward sees Linda, and confesses his love for her. Sammy then convinces Mickey to help him out in a robbery, which inevitably goes wrong – Mickey has to spend time in prison. When he is eventually released, his drug induced apathy (he's addicted to anti-depressants) prevent him from getting a job. Linda gets help from Edward (now on the housing committee) to get Mickey and her a new house. Mickey, however, continues to be cynical and depressed. Linda and Edward begin an affair. Mrs L shows Mickey Edward and Linda together, and Mickey is enraged. He finds the gun that Sammy hid in the botched robbery job, and tracks down Edward (who is at the town hall). Mrs J and Linda, realising what is going on, pursue him. He finds Edward and points the gun at him. A policeman asks Mickey to put the gun down. Mrs J emerges and reveals the two are brothers. Mickey, hysterical, torments his own position, and accidentally shoots Edward. The police then shoot Mickey.	"And do we blame superstition for what came to pass? Or could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class? Did you ever hear the story of the Johnstone twins. As like each other as two new pins"

Russell's Dramatic Devices

Dramatic Irony	The audience is aware throughout the play that Mickey and Edward are twins, but they do not know this until the very last scene.	Tragic Hero – A main character cursed by fate and in possession of a tragic flaw (both Mickey and Edward display some features of tragic heroes).
'The Fourth Wall'	The Narrator and Mrs Johnstone break the fourth wall when they speak to the audience directly at the beginning and end of the play.	Hamartia – The fatal character flaw of the tragic hero (their upbringings/differences, and also their bond between one another).
Stage Directions	The precise directions detailing how Mickey, 'uncontrollable with rage', 'waves' the gun around before it explodes at Edward.	Catharsis – The release of the audience's emotions through empathy with the characters.
Dramatic Tension	The events leading up to the final scene, including Edward and Linda's affair, and Mickey finding out, help to build the dramatic tension.	Internal Conflict – The struggle characters engage with over incidents/flows. (Mrs Johnstone's regret at giving one of her twins away).