**Blood Brothers –Techniques**

If you choose to write on ***Blood Brothers*** in the exam, you should me mentioning as many of the following points as you can. **You must mention AT LEAST 4 of these techniques.**

* Use the words **STAGE** and **AUDIENCE** in your essay
* Remember it’s a play – it’s meant to be performed rather than read in class. You should be thinking about how certain aspects of the play affect the **AUDIENCE.**

**Eg** *The opening scene is particularly effective, as it allows the audience to recognise the fate of the twin. It makes us want to watch the rest of the play to find out what has happened to them, and creates a feeling of tension.*

* The role of the **NARRATOR** – think about why he is important in the play. Russell creates a ‘character’ of the narrator, who acts a little like the Greek ‘Chorus’ from ancient tragedy whose role is to explain some of the key action on stage. The narrator also involves the audience by asking them directly to judge what they see. He helps to make sure that the audience stay a little ‘detached’ from the events of the play. He also helps them remember that this is a ‘story’.

He reveals that the brothers die at the very start of the play and from then on constantly reminds the audience of the twins’ fate. He presents the themes of fate, destiny and superstition throughout the play, but at the end he asks the audience to consider if it was social forces rather than 'fate' that caused the tragedy.

* **DRAMATIC IRONY** – when the audience knows more than the characters

Eg. The opening scene is an example of dramatic irony as we know the fate of the characters before they do. We watch them develop, unaware of their fate, and though they are unable to recognise signs of their downfall, we are.

* **STAGE DIRECTIONS** – these are important in allowing us to recognise what would be happening on the stage. They also provide extra information on the characters etc.
* **SOLILOQUY** - thecharacter stands alone of stage and appears to think out loud. This allows us to hear their innermost thoughts
* **ASIDE -** Similar to a soliloquy except that the character will not be alone on stage. When a character makes an aside, it is the accepted convention that while the audience can hear the words clearly, the other characters on stage are oblivious to them.

**NB What we hear in both a soliloquy and an aside is ALWAYS THE TRUTH – it allows us to hear their innermost thoughts.**

* **SETTING**
* **CHARACTERISATION/CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT**
* **OFF-STAGE ACTION -** events that take place away from the stage so the audience cannot see it. Eg We do not see what is going on with the robbery, but we hear it and tension is created in this way.
* **JUXTAPOSTION -** the placing of very different scenes side by side. Eg the opening scene contrasts with the one that follows where Mrs Johnstone sings about her life. This keeps the audience intrigued.

The play is a **TRAGEDY** and follows a **TRAGIC STRUCTURE.**

Mickey is a **TRAGIC HERO**. This means he is a good character but he has a **FATAL FLAW**. We watch his downfall because of his flaw.

**Mickey’s flaw** – his social position/jealousy? What do you think?

**A Tragic Hero** Mickey

**Hamartia**  flaw –jealousy/lack of understanding of social position

**Peripeteia**  fatal flaw brings hero down from respected position/starts to take over – robbery, goes to jail.

**Anagnorisis**  hero makes startling discovery/is suddenly aware of things as they truly are – realisation at the end of the play. Aware he can never be as successful as Eddie

**Catharsis** as we watch Mickey’s downfall, we, the audience, learn a lesson

**Restoration of Social Order** With the twins’ death, normality can be restored. Those involved can recognise the destruction that comes with social class.

**TRAGIC STRUCTURE**

1. **Exposition** - The exposition describes the mood and conditions existing at the beginning of the play. The time and place will be identified as well as the main characters and their positions, circumstances, and relationships to one another.
2. **Exciting Force** - Also sometimes called the complication or initial incident, the exciting force is what “gets things going.” The exciting force thus begins the **conflict** which will continue throughout the play.
3. **Rising Action** - The series of events leading to the climax comprise the rising action. These events provide a progressive intensity of interest for the audience. The rising action will involve more than one act.
4. **Climax** - The climax represents the turning point of the play. From this point on, the hero moves to his inevitable (often grisly) end.
5. **Falling Action -** The falling action includes those events occurring from the time of the climax up to the hero’s death. The episodes will show both advances and declines in the various forces acting upon the hero.
6. **Catastrophe** - The catastrophe concerns the necessary consequences of the hero’s actions (death). The catastrophe will be characteristically simple and brief.



* **SOCIAL CLASS AND DIVISION** - The characters in Blood Brothers are largely defined by the social class they live in. Their attitudes and behaviour are largely fixed, with the exception of the children.

Mickey and Edward grow and change as the story develops, making a friendship across the social divide, but one that is doomed by external forces.

Blood Brothers was completed in 1981, two years after the Conservative party leader Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. She felt that British manufacturing industry had become uncompetitive and saw the cause as weak employers and overly strong trades unions who were, she felt, only too willing to call their members out on strike. She reduced the powers of the workers’ unions and privatised (‘sold off’) many publicly owned companies. She closed many uncompetitive coal mines, too.

A short-term result was that Britain suffered an economic downturn and unemployment soared. This particularly affected industrialised working-class areas in the north of the country and Willy Russell would have seen this first hand in his home city. Liverpool’s famous docks, a traditional source of local employment, were allowed to run down and thousands of households fell into poverty; crime levels increased; housing was allowed to deteriorate and illegal drug use became more common. Some of this context is directly reflected in the play, for example, Russell shows the terrible effects of unemployment on Micky's self-esteem.

* **MARGARET THATCHER**

One of Thatcher’s central political beliefs was that success came to those who chose to work hard. In Blood Brothers, Russell contradicts this view. He shows a divided society by having Mickey and Edward attend very different schools and live in different houses.

That money and influential connections are necessary to become successful is written into the play. Mickey's failure, despite his good character and hard work, is the basis of the tragedy in the drama.

* **MARILYN MONROE**

**Marilyn Monroe** was a very famous Hollywood actress. Her image was well known even to people who did not watch her films. She was presented by the media as a kind of ‘perfect’ fantasy woman and she was shown to live a glamorous and carefree lifestyle. The reality was often very different. She needed anti-depressants and eventually died from an overdose of pills.

Russell uses references to Monroe throughout the play. At each point he refers to a different aspect of her life and public image. Mrs Johnstone enjoys the glamour of Monroe's public image. Later in the play Mickey becomes hooked on anti-depressant ‘nerve pills’ and this is compared to Monroe's own depression.

* **THEMES**
1. **Social Class & Education**

Education is linked to social class. Russell shows that wealth brings different educational opportunities and these lead to very different lifestyles. Eddie and Mickey are educated differently. One goes on to university and a successful career in politics, the other to a factory job making boxes. Redundancy and lack of opportunity then lead Mickey to crime, drug addiction and depression. Without a better education Russell is saying that Mickey had few options, and so we are asked to see Mickey's mistakes in a sympathetic light.

The effects of education shape the lives of the women in the play too. When Mrs Johnstone loses her husband she falls into poverty from which her lack of education has provided her with no easy means of escape. She can take unskilled work, and also has to rely on the State for rehousing to a better place.

Compare her with Mrs Lyons who also, despite presumably a middle-class education, is still not self-reliant. In this case Russell is suggesting perhaps that the traditional lives the women lead have less freedom, even when they are educated.

1. **Superstition**

Each of the major characters is presented as being trapped and plagued by various kinds of misfortune and bad luck. Russell seems to be asking us to consider whether there really is such a thing as fate or destiny or whether life pans out because of natural rather than supernatural reasons, because of the way we are educated and live.

So although fate and superstition is a recurring idea, everything in the play leads to question whether these things really exist.

1. **Nature V Nurture**

The 'nature versus nurture' debate is about how much a persons life is determined by their inherited genetics (their 'nature') and how much is determined by the environment they grow up in ('nurture'). The boys are identical twins and so the difference in the way their lives turn out must be a result of their different upbringings and social positions. Russell uses the twins idea to persuade us that attitudes in society influence peoples lives more than their individual efforts at wanting to do well.

Russell's play is deliberately objecting to a view that was popular in the UK at the time the play was written. Margaret Thatcher's right wing conservative government claimed that everyone who wanted to work hard could be successful. But Russell clearly objects to this view