

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Notes on Pages 5-7

The opening of this scene acts as a prologue. The audience is shown the outcome of the play. The narrator asks the audience to 'watch' what led up to these events.

Mrs Johnstone is introduced:

- She is thirty, but looks fifty
- She has seven children and is pregnant again (with twins)
- Her husband has recently left her
- She is struggling to pay the bills (she can't pay the milkman)
- Their low social status is conformed by her children
 - "How come I'm on free dinners?"
 - "I'm starvin' an' there's nothin' in. There never bloody well is"
- She is compared, often negatively, to Marilyn Monroe
- She is due to start a cleaning job for Mrs Lyons

Social Class:

This theme is introduced early on in the play. We see the Johnstone family and their position and we are then shown the Lyon's household as a comparison:

- Mrs Johnstone has seven children, with two more on the way
- Mr and Mrs Lyons don't have any children
- Mr and Mrs Lyons live in a large house
- The Johnstone family live in a council house
- Mr Lyons has an important job and Mrs Lyons doesn't work
- Mrs Johnstone has to work to support her family

Superstition:

This is another important theme in the play. We learn that Mrs Johnstone is superstitious ("new shoes on the table").

Note the role of the narrator here. His lines seem ominous, suggesting that something bad is going to happen. His lines all suggest bad luck:

- "Salt's been spilled ... looking glass cracked ... one lone magpie"

He also plays the roles of several characters (milkman, gynaecologist) so he is often on the stage.

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Re- read pages 5-9

From the start of the play

To 'OK, Mummy, let's have a little listen to the baby's ticker, shall we?'

1. Why does the play start by revealing the ending? What effect does this have on the audience?
2. Why are we told so much about Mrs Johnstone in this section?
3. Why does the narrator play other roles as well?
4. Why do you think that the writer doesn't name Mrs Johnstone's children?
5. Why is Mrs Johnstone's job with Mrs Lyons so important?

Notes on Pages 9-13

Note how the writer builds up to Mrs. Johnstone's decision to give away a twin:

- She can just cope with one more baby
- Hope is snatched away, it's twins!
- She can't manage her money or her children

Note how more pressure is put on Mrs. Johnstone by Mrs. Lyons:

- She gets carried away with the idea 'It's mad but it's wonderful'
- She is Mrs. J's boss and in a position of power over her
- Mrs. J feels sorry for her infertility 'I reach out'
- She reminds Mrs. J that she has been 'threatened with the welfare' and that her children could be taken into care
- She makes her feel that she would be offering the child a better life 'a bike with both wheels on'
- She tells her that she will be able to see the baby every day
- She makes it a binding agreement 'on the bible'

Mrs. Johnstone has been pressurised into this decision through guilt and desperation but swearing on the bible makes it binding to her. Now she feels frightened and alone. This is emphasised by the heartbeat sound effect.

Note the effect of the music in this section. The song 'My Child' is sung by both women, it emphasises that Mrs Lyons is taking over the role of mother and can offer the child a much better life.

Note the role of the narrator. He acts as a sort of commentator on the action also as a conscience. He emphasises the terrible consequences of this decision. His language is emotive and extreme, unlike the other characters:

'Grew as surely as a seed in a mother's womb'

'In the name of Jesus the thing was done'

He links into the second part of this extract with the theme of debts to be paid: 'But a debt is a debt and must be paid'

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Re- read pages 9-13

From ' I was dead worried about having another baby you know....'

To 'But a debt is a debt and must be paid.'

1. How does the writer create sympathy for Mrs. Johnstone in this extract?
2. How does the writer create sympathy for Mrs. Lyons in this extract?
3. What convinces Mrs' Johnstone that she should give one of her twins to Mrs. Lyons?
4. Why is the narrator in this scene? What does he add to the atmosphere?
5. What do the music/sound effects add to this scene?

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Notes on Pages 13-20

In the stage directions, Mrs Johnstone returns home with her twins. This must be 5 months later. She is greeted by the people she owes money to. They take back the stuff she has bought on credit, despite her protests.

Mrs. J. sings 'Easy Terms' to her babies:

- *Easy terms* is a play on words meaning to be close to someone and also a way of paying back a debt over a long period of time.
- Living on the *never-never* means to live on loans that we never be paid back.
- The song makes connections between Mrs J's debt to Mrs Lyons and the debts she must pay to her creditors.
- We feel her sorrow that she must give up her baby forever 'I must not learn to call you mine'.
- Mrs Lyons comes to claim her baby. Mrs J. begs for a few more days but Mrs Lyons is determined to have her side of the bargain. She chooses the baby she wants, 'Don't tell me which one'.
- Mrs J tells her other children that the second twin died and he is in heaven where 'He'll have everything he wants'.

- When Mrs J returns to work, Mrs Lyons' discomfort is obvious. 'If he needs picking up, / shall pick him up. All right?'
- **She forces Mrs J out of her son's life by:**
- Sacking her
- When Mrs J. complains and threatens to take her baby back, she gives her money and accuses her of selling her baby
- Says she has committed a crime
- When Mrs J says she will tell the whole story she uses superstition. She invents the lie that twins secretly separately will die the day that they learn they are twins. 'You won't tell anyone... if you do you will kill them'.

The Narrator sings 'Shoes upon the table'. This is directed at Mrs J and emphasises that the secret cannot be kept forever. He shows Mrs J's feelings of disgust:

'You're always gonna know what was done
Even when you shut your eyes you still see
You sold a son'

As well as her superstition (*'salt's been spilled'*) the song draws upon Mrs J's religious beliefs that she has committed a sin (*'the devil's got your number'*). The mention of a rosary suggests that Mrs J is a Roman Catholic.

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Read page 13 – 20

To 'He's knocking at your door.'

1. How does the writer develop the idea of debts to be paid?
2. How does the writer create sympathy for Mrs. Johnstone in this extract?
3. How has your opinion of Mrs. Lyons changed?
4. How does Mrs. Johnstone's superstition become important in this extract?
5. What is the role of the narrator in this scene? What do you think he means by 'the devil's got your number?'

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Notes on Page 20-27

Nearly 8 years have passed.

In this section we see:

- How Mickey and Eddie have changed because of their different upbringings
- The immediate bond between the twins
- Mrs Johnstone's horrified reaction to seeing Edward after all these years and her sorrow at missing her son
- The influence of Sammy on the younger brothers

Answer these questions in full in your book.

- Explain how you see Mickey's relationship with his mother. Find a quotation to prove this.
- Why is Mrs. J. so hard on Mickey when he wants to play near the big houses?
- In this section, Mickey is played by an adult actor pretending to be Mickey aged 7. Why do you think this decision was made? Why not use a child actor?
- How does Mickey's rhyming poem about being 'nearly eight' make you feel sympathy for him?
- How does the writer bring out the humour in Mickey's first meeting with Eddie?
- What are the main differences between the twins at this age? How are they similar?
- When the boys become blood brothers, there is dramatic irony. What is the effect of this?
- What is your first impression of Sammy?
- Mrs. Johnstone's reaction to hearing Mickey call Eddie his 'brother' is extreme. Why has the writer included this detail?
- Why does Mrs. Johnstone tell Eddie to 'Beat it'?
- What is the effect on the audience of her apparent cruelty to the son she has not seen for 7 years followed by the song 'Easy Terms'?

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Notes on Pages 28-45

In this section we see:

- Mickey going to Eddie's house and Mrs Lyons realising who he is
- Mrs Lyons loose her temper and hit Eddie
- Mickey, Eddie and Linda all becoming close friends
- Mrs Lyons forcing her family to move away
- Mrs Johnstone giving Eddie a locket with a picture of her
- The Johnstone family getting relocated to the countryside to 'start a new life'.

Answer the following questions:

- How is Mrs Lyons despair with Eddie and Mickey's friendship shown?
- What is the importance of the scene when Mrs Lyons hits Eddie?
- How are the themes of death and fate brought into the games the children are playing?
- How is the growing friendship of Mickey, Eddie and Linda shown?
- How does Russell show the prejudice of the times with the police treatment of Mickey and Eddie?
- What is the importance of the locket that Mrs Johnstone gives to Eddie?
- What is the importance of Mickey's song when he finds that Eddie has moved?
- What role does the Narrator play in this section? How do his lines link to the theme of fate?
- What is the dramatic importance of the positive end to the scene?

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Act 2

Pages 46-53

After the optimistic end to Act 1, the beginning of Act 2 starts on a positive note. Mrs. Johnstone sings 'Marilyn Monroe', this time she appears in control of her life.

Answer these questions in full:

Page 46-48

1. Why is it mentioned that Sammy burnt the school down?
2. How is Eddie's relationship with Mrs. Lyons different to Mickey's relationship with Mrs. Johnstone?

Page 48-50

3. What does the incident on the bus reveal about Sammy's relationship with his brother?
4. How has Linda's relationship with Mickey developed?

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Page 50-53

Eddie

- Eddie is in a very strict boarding school
- He is a high achiever ('talk of Oxbridge')
- The teacher is an unpleasant bully who talks of 'flogging' Eddie
- The wearing of Mrs. Johnstone's locket gets Eddie into trouble. This shows it means a lot to him. His connection to Mrs. J and Mickey is stronger than he will let on and even after 7 years he will risk his whole school career rather than give up his precious photo and locket.
- His swearing at the teacher shows the strength of his emotions, his determination and his rebellious streak.
- When he shows Mrs L the locket, he has no shame about it (there is dramatic irony when he asks her 'don't you have secrets').
- The knowledge that Eddie has kept this photo of Mrs J so carefully and secretly pushes Mrs L over the edge. She is obviously going mad.
- She mistakes Mickey for Eddie, nearly letting the cat out of the bag!
- This scene is very tense for the audience and ends with the Narrator singing 'The devil's got your number' to draw our attention to Mrs. L's torment.

Page 50-53

Mickey

- Mickey is at the local secondary school, he is obviously bored and not learning anything
- His future does not look bright and it seems he will not pass many exams
- The class is rowdy and there are some jokes in this scene to make it lighthearted in comparison to Eddie's more serious scenes.
- Like Eddie, he is rebellious and rude to the teacher. He also ends up being suspended.

Answer these questions in your book.

- What are the differences between the twins at this age?

- What are the similarities?
- What point is the writer making about society?
- How does the writer use dramatic techniques to make his point?

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Page 54-58

In this section, Mickey and Eddie meet again after 7 years separation. They immediately become friends again. There is a lot of play on the fact that the boys are twins and don't realise that they look similar to each other. The writer also brings out the problems and anxieties of being a 14 year old boy.

1. How has Mickey and Linda's relationship developed?
2. What does the song 'That Guy' reveal about the being a 14 year old boy? What is the dramatic irony in the song?
3. How does this meeting echo their first meeting at the age of 7?
4. Why do you think Mrs. J. allows the boys to be friends?
5. What does her reaction to the cinema reveal about her relationship with her son?

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Act 2

Pages 58-60

This scene shows how much strain has been put upon Mrs. Lyons and how far she will go to keep her 'son'.

In your **main notes on Act 2**, answer this question:

How has Willy Russell made this scene dramatic for the audience?

Consider:

- Presentation of the relationships between the characters
- Language / dialogue
- Use of music and sound effects
- Positioning of characters on stage

On the **Mrs. Lyons character page** write down three quotations which show that Mrs. Lyons is losing her sanity.

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Act 2

Pages 61-66

In this scene, years pass. Mickey, Eddie and Linda become close friends. The mood is light hearted as the Narrator describes their carefree lives between the ages of 14 and 18. As Eddie prepares to go to university, he makes Mickey ask Linda out (at last) but not before hinting at his own feelings for Linda.

In your **main notes on Act 2**, answer these questions.

1. The narrator's words are quite light hearted but what hints are there that all will not turn out well?
2. How are Eddie and Mickey similar in their relationship with Linda? How are they different?
3. Why is the title of Eddie's song, 'I'm not saying a word' important for the themes of the play?

On Eddie's character page;

Write down two quotations which show his feelings for Linda.

On Mickey's character page:

Write down two quotations which show his feelings for Linda.

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers

Act 2

Pages 67-73

A lot happens in this section. In the three months that Eddie is at university, Linda gets pregnant and marries Mickey. They move in with Mrs. Johnstone. Mickey is made redundant from his factory job and is unable to find any work. The country is in the middle of a recession and unemployment, particularly amongst unskilled workers like Mickey, is extremely high. When Mickey and Eddie meet at Christmas, they have never been further apart. Eddie is full of the fun he has had at university and, to Mickey, he seems like a kid. In a desperate attempt to get some cash to take Linda out for New Year, Mickey agrees to do a job for Sammy.

In your **main notes on Act 2**, answer these questions.

1. How does the writer show the differences between Mickey and Eddie?
2. What does the song 'Miss Jones' add to this scene?
3. Why does the writer use dual action in the section when Mickey meets Sammy and Eddie asks Linda to marry him?

On Eddie's character page;

Write down two quotations which show his feelings for Linda.

On Mickey's character page:

Write down two quotations which show how Mickey has changed.

On Linda's character page:

Write down two quotations to show her feeling for Eddie.

Notes and Questions on Blood Brothers Act 2 pages 73-83(End)

In this section, the final moments of the tragedy are played out. The audience is reminded of the inevitability of the tragic ending.

Mickey is forced into crime because he has lost his job. Sammy, who has always been a danger to Mickey, offers him the chance to make quick money by joining him on a burglary. The robbery goes wrong and a man is killed by Sammy. Mickey ends up in prison, addicted to anti-depressants. His spirit and his personality are killed by his experiences and the tablets. After about 5 years in prison, Mickey is released. He is a broken man. Linda tries to help Mickey off the tablets, but he is addicted. She turns to Eddie for help and ends up having an affair with him. Mrs. Lyons tells Mickey about the affair. Armed with a gun, Mickey finds Eddie in a meeting. He is told by Mrs. Johnstone that Eddie is his brother. At that moment, the gun accidentally goes off, killing Eddie. Mickey is shot by the police. The play ends as it begun.

1. How does the narrator link the robbery to the games they played as children?
2. How would the audience react to seeing Mickey depressed?
3. What does the incident with the tablets show about Linda's feelings for Mickey?
4. Why does Linda turn to Eddie?
5. Why does Mrs. Lyons tell Mickey about Linda's affair?
6. How does the narrator build up tension as Mickey goes to find Eddie?
7. What do Mickey's final comments reveal about the important ideas in the play?
8. Why did the writer make the play end as it began?