

Blood Brothers



Act One

Lesson 3: Social and Historical Context

Blood Brothers



Objectives:

To learn about the social and historical context of the play.

Liverpool

At the turn of the twentieth century (1900) Liverpool was one of the world's richest cities. Trade with the British Empire flowed through its port and brought with it great economic growth. But as the Empire declined so did the fortunes of the city and by the second half of the century (the setting of Blood Brothers), Liverpool was deep in economic recession. The once bustling docks had fallen derelict and unemployment swept through the city plunging thousands of households into poverty. Crime increased, housing conditions worsened and drug use became widespread.

Poverty

At the beginning of the play we learn that the Johnstone family are very poor. In the opening scenes Mrs Johnstone reveals that she is an unemployed single mother and we see her struggling to pay her bills (‘I start a job next week. I’ll have money comin’ in an’ I’ll be able to pay y’) and provide for her family (‘Ey Mother, I’m starvin’ an’ there’s nothin’ in’). Her children are on ‘free dinners’ and lack discipline. At the beginning of the play Mrs Johnstone does find a cleaning job but her wage is low and barely enough to live on. For the majority of the first act the Johnstones live in what would be a cramped ‘back to back’ terraced house in Liverpool’s inner city slums.

Social and Historical Context

Can you complete the following sentences?

Blood Brothers is set in...

The city was once...

But as the British Empire crumbled...

The decline of the city brought hardships such as...

The Johnstone family are...

They live in...

Life is difficult because...