

How Does the Willy Russell Use the Characters in the Play Blood Brothers to Show the Differences in Social Class?

Willy Russell uses the contrast of characters to show the major difference in Social Class, in the play Blood Brothers.

Mrs Johnstone was the first character introduced to us in the play. Mrs Johnstone is portrayed as a stereotypical Working Class mother. In the introductory song, Russell uses Mrs Johnstone to create this stereotype.

“We got married at the Registry an’ then we had a ’do”

Mentioning the Registry, Russell is trying to show that Working Class people are unable to fund a Wedding in a Church. Also, using the term 'do' Russell is exemplifying the language that people of a Working Class background use, unlike somebody of Upper Class who would probably use the term 'Wedding Reception.' However, Mrs Johnstone proves she is aspiring to be Upper Class when Russell uses her opinions of an Upper Class lifestyle.

“We all had curly Salmon Sandwiches”

Mrs Johnstone, like other Working Class people, thought that curly Salmon sandwiches were posh, but she failed to meet her aspirations when she states other parts of her Wedding.

“An’ how the ale did flow”

When she reveals 'Ale' it makes her Wedding sound quite cheap, and someone of Upper Class would be known for drinking something like Champagne or an Expensive Wine, clearly showing she is from Working Class.

As Mrs Johnstone is finalising her song, a Milkman enters. Russell uses the Milkman as a good way of emphasising the problems that Mrs Johnstone and other Working Class mothers have financially.

“You owe me three pounds, seventeen pence an’ four pence an’
either you pay up today, like now, or I’ll be forced to cut off your
deliveries”

Russell uses this to enlighten the struggle that Mrs Johnstone, and other mothers from a Working Class background have, providing basics for their children.

Next, four children are introduced to us, Russell uses this to highlight the fact that although Mrs Johnstone is in a dilemma she is far too busy to act on it. The first Child is included, to reflect on the previous conversation with the Milkman.

“Mam, Mam the baby’s cryin’. He wants his bottle mam, where’s the milk?”

This is applying more pressure to Mrs Johnstone’s problems. The next character that we become aware of is Mrs Lyons. Immediately, we get an impression of her wealth, as she enters carrying a parcel containing new shoes.

Russell now uses Mrs Johnstone again, to Juxta Position both of the character aspirations. Mrs Johnstone’s are clearly going to be set lower than Mrs Lyon’s.

“It’s such a lovely house it’s a pleasure to clean it”
“It’s a pity it’s so big, I’m finding it rather large at present”

Already, Russell has proven that both Classes are far apart, financially, to add to this Russell mentions Mr Lyons in the play.

“The company sent him out for nine months”

This quite clearly indicates that her husband has a good providing job. Mrs Lyons Family have never needed anything they couldn’t have, whereas Mrs Johnstone always needs things she is unable to get, this is common amongst Working Class families.

People in Working Class backgrounds tend to have more children.

“Having babies is like clockwork to me”

This emphasises the fact that people from Working Class backgrounds are so used to having children, they don’t need to change their daily routine.

Further on in the play, Russell establishes superstition, to add to the creation of the Social Class backgrounds. This becomes evident soon after Mrs Lyons has entered.

“Jesus Christ Mrs Lyons, what are y’ trying to do?”

Here Russell cleverly used this, to reveal how Mrs Johnstone, and other mothers in a similar situation to her, feel they need to rely on good luck for good things to happen to them. After this, Mrs Lyons, uses her superiority to manipulate Mrs Johnstone to her advantage.

“With two more children how can you possibly avoid some of them being put into care-surely it’s better to give one child to me”

Russell uses this to Juxta Pose both characters, in the next song. It highlights the different lifestyles that both children would receive, according to the Class they were brought up in.

“Silver trays to take meals on”
“A bike with both wheels on”

Both of these lines prove that the aspirations for children in the two Classes are based so far apart. Working Class mothers are set low, as a child’s toy is pointed out, however Upper Class mothers rise above this, as they state their children’s well-being and reputation.

Later on in the play, Russell introduces the Catalogue Man and Finance Man, these characters are used to signify the problems people of Working Class have related to finance, and the circle of debt.

“Y’ shouldn’t sign for the bloody stuff missus, if y’ know y’ can’t pay
y’ shouldn’t bloody well sign”

Here Russell is highlighting the fact that Working Class mothers find it addictive to sign for goods knowing that they cannot pay. This method was called “paying on the never never” and was common amongst women in Liverpool during the 1970’s. Later on in this scene, Russell uses the language of the Finance man to clearly emphasise the way in which Working Class women are treated.

“Yeh well y’ bloody well shouldn’t”

The Finance man is clearly also Working Class, he feels he has more authority, and has a right to treat people in the same Class

as himself badly. If he was to speak to someone of an Upper Class her wouldn't use this language as they probably have more authority over him.

In the next scene, soon after the Catalogue and Finance men have exited, Mrs Johnstone finds herself, again, getting caught up in a spiral of debt.

“Let's look in the Catalogue now Mam!”

Russell uses these children, to exaggerate the stress and worry that children from Working Class backgrounds put their mother under. Using this Russell proves that manipulation is yet again sinking in.

“We'll look in the catalogue next week.”

Further on in the play, Mrs Lyons and Mrs Johnstone seem to swap roles.

“I'll tell someone...I'll tell the Police”

As Mrs Lyons has an Upper Class status, the police seem to be more lenient with her, unlike Mrs Johnstone, whose family are continually in and out of trouble. Again this is showing the disrespect to people of Social Class. Mrs Lyons sees the Police as a major threat, as her squeaky clean reputation will be ruined.

“I Got y' an' y' bloody know it”

Here, when Linda is introduced, you can immediately sense that she too is from a Working Class background, because she is with Sammy, who uses language such as 'bloody', although he is still a child.

**WHY DIDN'T YOU GIVE ME AWAY MAM!
I COULD HAVE BEEN. I COULD HAVE BEEN HIM! NO!**

This end selection of dialogue shows how both classes are set so far apart. Russell shows this by using this speech. This is emphasising that the way you are when you grow up, how you are treated, the way you're spoken to and the things you have, are all down to the Class in which you're brought up in.

