

Characterisation	
What does the Narrator do?	Introduces the story; comments on the characters' actions; invites the audience to judge them; plays other characters in the story.
What does the Narrator symbolise?	The role of fate in the characters' lives; the inevitability of the tragedy; the influence of superstition; judgement on morality.
What does Mrs Johnstone do?	Gets left by her husband; struggles in poverty; gives away Edward; brings up her children in the best way she can; tells Mickey the truth at the end.
What does Mrs Johnstone symbolise?	The struggle of the working class to survive and thrive; the limitations placed on women in society; the self-sacrifice of a mother; wisdom as she grows from making unwise choices to being settled after rehousing; warm family relationships; secrets.
What does Mrs Lyons do?	Persuades Mrs Johnstone to give her Edward, grows increasingly desperate and unstable; threatens Mrs Johnstone; tells Mickey about Linda's affair.
What does Mrs Lyons symbolise?	The power of the ruling elite; the destructive influence of guilt; the limitations of women; isolation
What does Edward do?	Befriends Mickey by giving him things; shows defiance to a policeman; reveals his nature by swearing at a teacher; has an affair with Linda; provides housing and a job for her and Mickey.
What does Edward symbolise?	The individual generosity of the ruling elite; the systemic inequality behind the class system; the impact of a wealthy upbringing on personal success.
What does Mickey do?	Grows up in poverty; idolises Sammy; gets punished by police/teachers; gets Linda pregnant; becomes unemployed; commits a crime and gets jailed; becomes addicted to painkillers; resents Edward's successful life and affair with Linda; finds out they are twins; kills Edward.
What does Mickey symbolise?	The struggle of the working-class; the impact of poverty on opportunities; the systemic inequality of society; the devastating impact of unemployment; the reasons for committing crime; the damage of addiction
What does Linda do?	Defends Mickey when they are children; tells Mickey she loves him; gets pregnant; warns Mickey not to commit crime; has an affair with Edward
What does Linda symbolise?	The innocence of childhood; the cycle of poverty by repeating Mrs Johnstone's actions; the struggle of a single mother while Mickey is in prison.
What does Mr Lyons do?	Leaves Mrs Lyons to bring up Edward; focuses on money and work; buys Edward a gun; gives material but not emotional support to his family.
What does Mr Lyons symbolise?	Absent fathers and the limitations on women. (Just like Mickey's dad, who is absent)
What does Sammy do?	Older brother of Mickey; looked up to; gradually commits crimes which keep getting worse throughout the play; persuades Mickey to join him.
What does Sammy symbolise?	Bad role models; the glamour of crime in poverty; the desperation caused by unemployment.

Structural devices	
What is multi-role?	One actor playing multiple parts such as the milkman/gynecologist. Part of Brecht's alienation effect.
Why does Russell juxtaposition comedy and tragedy?	To heighten the emotional impact of the personal and societal tragedy of poverty; to present life realistically; to draw attention to themes such as class division in a humorous way.
What is the cyclical structure of the play?	The play begins and ends with the scene of the twins' death, reinforcing the inevitable nature of the tragedy. The characters cannot escape from their actions.
What are parallel scenes?	The same thing happening in two contexts: The policeman visiting; the suspensions from school. Shows systemic injustice for the working-class.
What is a monologue?	When a character speaks on their own – Mickey's poem about his idolising of Sammy
What is cross-cutting?	When two scenes are going on simultaneously onstage: Linda and Edward's conversation whilst Sammy persuades Mickey to do the robbery.
Motifs and significance	
What is the importance of Marilyn Monroe?	Marilyn Monroe was a glamorous and successful film star who struggled with infertility, broken marriages and drug addiction. She represents the hope Mrs Johnstone has for a life of glamour and the reality of her life after her husband leaves. She also symbolises Mickey's drug addiction.
What is the importance of the number seven?	7 is associated with luck, such as breaking a mirror (7 years bad luck) and secrets in the superstitious magpie nursery rhyme. 7 is also important in the Bible as Jesus says we should forgive 7 x 7. Mrs Johnstone has 7 children. The boys meet 7 years apart, starting when they are 7 years old.
Why are guns important?	The children play with guns. Mickey looks up to Sammy for his toy guns/violent play. Edward gets a toy gun from his dad and gives it to Mickey, foreshadowing the violence of Mickey's later life when he is involved in the robbery and when he kills Edward.
What is meant by new shoes on the table?	They are a superstition, and the first sign that Mrs Lyons has started to believe in the influence of fate/superstition as she is punished by her guilt at her actions.
What is the importance of dancing?	Dancing represents glamour and freedom for Mrs Johnstone; dancing is more restrictive when Mrs Lyons is teaching Edward to dance; dancing become sinister when it is Mickey's mind that has gone 'dancing' as he has no control over himself and he is hard for his wife and mother to reach.
What does the locket represent?	The secrets which are kept from the children; how valuable Mrs Johnstone sees her role as Edward's mother; a barrier between Mrs Lyons and Edward.

Themes	
What is social class?	A division of society based on social status and wealth.
What classes are there and what are their characteristics?	Middle class – various ‘professional’ occupations, such as doctor, lawyer; tend to own their houses; likely to be university educated; more likely to use private healthcare or education. Working class – traditionally manufacturing occupations such as miner, factory worker; more likely to rent or live in social housing; more likely to have fewer qualifications or study at university.
What is the relationship between the classes?	Historically there has been conflict between the classes, as the middle and upper classes make the rules, and so some working-class people feel that society is not run for their benefit, but for the ruling elite. Social mobility means moving between the classes, sometimes because of meritocracy.
What is fate?	The belief that your life is predetermined and that there is an inescapable destiny for you.
What is superstition?	A widely held but irrational belief in actions which cause good or bad luck.
What does the play tell us about mothers?	It focuses on the sacrifices mothers make for their children. It celebrates the warm and caring role of a mother through Mrs Johnstone, but challenges Mrs Lyons’ overprotectiveness as a mother. The two women are juxtaposed and we are asked to consider what makes a good mother.
What is the role of the family?	Large families can contribute to the struggles faced and increase poverty, but they prevent the isolation and loneliness which Edward experiences. Families are seen as having a large influence on what happens later in life, and they are also ways of passing on values, whether good or bad.
What problems can be caused by poverty and greed?	Poverty can lead to crime through the desperation to have money, which can then contribute to a cycle of unemployment after being criminalised. Poverty can also lead to low self-esteem as well as making decisions from desperation. Poverty can create instability in the family and wider society. Greed contributes to a widening of inequality and results in deprivation for others.
What attitudes do some people have towards poverty?	Some see the poor as able to be manipulated and taken advantage of, such as when Mrs Lyons persuades Mrs Johnstone to give her Edward. Many people judge Mrs Johnstone for her poverty such as the catalogue man. There is a divide between how the wealthy see poverty as less limiting, and are ignorant towards its effects, whilst those who are in poverty recognise how desperate it can make their situation.
What is the difference between private and state education?	Private education is paid for, whilst state education is a universal provision for all children. Private schools educate around 7% of children in the UK. Mickey is at state school, whilst Edward is at a private boarding school.
What is a secondary modern school?	From 1944, a tiered system of education existed in Britain, where students took the 11+ exam. This decided whether they would attend academic grammar school, where they would gain qualifications and go on to university, or secondary modern, which students generally left at 15 without qualifications. Secondary moderns were attended by 75% of pupils. Mickey and Linda attend a secondary modern school.
What is the impact of education?	Education has a dramatic impact on future opportunities and can be an important driver of social mobility.
What are some of the causes of crime?	Poverty is often a cause of crime, especially as it leads to desperation, low self-esteem and despair. Family circumstances are also something which can influence whether or not someone commits a crime. Once a crime has been committed, it is often difficult to turn this around and avoid further crimes.
What does the play tell us about growing up?	As the characters grow up, they begin to feel the impacts of class more. The patterns of their childhood are repeated in later life, suggesting the influence of upbringing over people. Working-class people are forced to grow up earlier due to the impact of poverty. Childhood is idealised.

Context	
What is the Welfare State?	The idea of a support system, following the Beveridge Report's recommendations in 1942 to combat the social ills of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness; a safety net for people who are struggling to support themselves.
What is Thatcherism?	The rejection of the Welfare State and the idea that too much intervention from the state is bad for society. Also associated with privatisation.
What is Capitalism?	The belief in private ownership of the means of production in order to make profit.
What is Socialism?	The belief in equality and a social safety net; 'from each, according to their means; to each, according to their need'.
What was Liverpool in the 1980s like?	It suffered from deindustrialisation as the manufacturing industry was greatly reduced. This led to unemployment of up to 40%. There was overcrowding in the city and in social housing. It was a predominantly working-class city. It was also a lively hub of arts, music and theatre.
What are the effects of mass unemployment?	It leads to poverty and can contribute to intergenerational poverty. It can increase levels of crime. It can also have a personal impact on the individuals who are unemployed as they struggle to survive.
What are the causes of mass unemployment?	Deindustrialisation – closing down manufacturing industry. Privatisation – profits increasing for shareholders and redundancies for the workers. In times of recession (when there is not enough money circulating), unemployment can also have a cumulative effect on other industries such as retail.
Literary and social theories	
What is Marxism?	The belief that the two classes (proletariat or working-class; bourgeoisie or middle-class) are in opposition with one another due to inequalities between them. The rejection of the bourgeoisie in favour of an equal society where the means of production are state, rather than privately owned.
What is the Nature vs Nurture debate?	The discussion of whether your genetics or your upbringing has more of an impact on your character and personality traits.
What does Aristotle's Poetics teach us about tragedy?	Tragedy explores the fall of a hero because of circumstances outside of his control. The role of fate is often key. Tragedy's purpose is to have a catharsis or cleansing of the audience's emotions. Tragedy has a chorus who comments on the action but are unable to influence it.
What are some of the main features of Brechtian Theatre?	Communication with the audience; a socio-political purpose; songs and moments which remind the audience that the actors are pretending; a clear message about the problems in society; the alienation effect.
What is a self-fulfilling prophecy?	A belief about the future which is said to someone and makes it come true e.g. telling someone at school they will fail makes them more likely to fail.
What is feminism?	The belief that women are subjugated by patriarchal society and should try to overturn this in favour of equality for all.