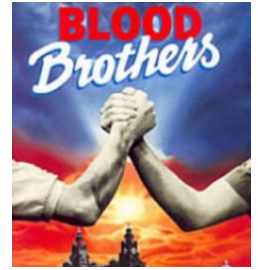
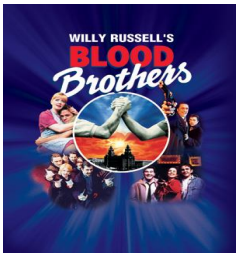


WILLY RUSSELL'S
BLOOD
Brothers



Revision Booklet



Blood Brothers Context

1. Where is the setting of Blood Brothers?

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2. What qualities are Liverpudlians known for?

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3. What were one of the main issues for the working class in Liverpool during the 1980's?

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4. At what time is Blood Brothers set?

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5. Why might Mrs Johnstone's neighbours disapprove of her?

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6. Find 5 key facts about education during this time.

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7. What was the name given to manual workers?

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8. What type of houses did most working class people live in?

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9. What were the conditions of the Council Houses like?

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.....

10. Why were 'New' towns created?

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11. What was the name of the 'New' town that was created?

.....

12. What effect did uprooting people have?

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13. What were the aims of the playwright?

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.....
.....

14. Which characters highlight this aim?

.....

Social context

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.

Is it important to use a Liverpudlian accent?

The setting is integral to the intentions of Willy Russell. Although a lot of the themes and issues are universal, he based the play in his home city in order to express his experience of growing up there and situations that were unique to Liverpool at that time. The use of the Liverpudlian accents for the Johnstones and Linda is part of the presentation of their social class.

Blood Brothers Context

Liverpool

Liverpool, because of its position on the River Mersey, was a prosperous seaport in the 19th century.

It is a city of many contrasts.

In the 20th century, because of the silting of the river, it was a place of financial depression, which led to unemployment and strikes.

There was a big gap between the rich and the poor.



The People of Liverpool

Liverpudlians are known for their warmth, hospitality and wit.

Liverpool is also famous for its football teams and impact on culture – the Mersey Beat (poetry), the Beatles (music) and playwrights, architects etc.

Mrs Johnstone's wit and warmth typify these qualities.



Unemployment

Unemployment reached 25% in the 1980s.

At the time the play is set, factories were closing down. At the start of act 2, Sammy is already on the dole, and the song 'Take a Letter Miss Jones' illustrates how this rising unemployment adversely affects Mickey's life and tempts him into crime.

Being out of work creates low self-esteem; particularly for traditional men who feel they need to support their family.



Views at the time

Blood Brothers is set in Liverpool, between the 1950s and the 1970s.

At the time, people strongly disapproved of sex before marriage and this is why Mrs Johnstone 'has to' marry quickly.

Divorce was uncommon and this is another reason the neighbours might disapprove of her.



Although the 1945 Education act had made grammar schools free, working class children had to pass the 11+ to gain entry to the grammar schools. The pass mark was kept deliberately high. Few children were allowed the privilege of a grammar school education, and even if they gained a place, there was no guarantee that they would leave with qualifications, as the school leaving age was 15.

Grammar Schools

Pupils at grammar schools studied academic subjects and took O levels. Some went on to take A levels, while others were under pressure from parents to leave school, get a job and bring money into the household.

There were far fewer university places then, so most would go into employment after school.



Secondary Modern Schools

Children who failed the 11+ would go to a secondary modern school to be prepared for life in the trades. Boys would study practical skills like bricklaying, alongside academic work, and girls would learn how to cook. Many of these schools were under-funded.



Qualifications

If pupils were not considered 'bright' they were not allowed to take CSEs. These qualifications were not worth as much as O Levels, taken at grammar school. (GCSEs are much more inclusive) So it was common for children to leave school without any qualifications at all. It was more difficult for them to get on in life.

Poverty

There is a clearly established link between poverty and under-achievement at school. Edward is sent to a private, fee-paying boarding school and will take O levels, A levels and go on to university.

Mickey leaves school and goes into employment; things go wrong when he is made redundant, whereas Edward has a much more secure 'white collar' job. Manual workers were called 'blue collar' workers; they were more affected by closure of factories and the scarcity of work connected with the docks.



Council Housing

Council houses were the homes of most working class people in the 1950s and 1960s. The terraced houses had a lot to recommend them, but they were also cramped and lacked inside toilets and bathrooms. They did not have central heating and were heated mostly by coal fires. Their inner city locations were often dirty and there was nowhere for children to play as they rarely had gardens.



'New' Towns

To improve standards of living, the government moved people away from the terraced houses into new council accommodation in the countryside. 'New' towns were created like Skelmersdale, and existing places were developed, like Runcorn and Winsford. Some high rise blocks were built also.



Bright New Day

Mrs Johnstone's family is certainly helped by their move, although not as much as she had hoped.

In many ways, it is already too late for the older children, and the unemployment situation was often worse away from the city.

Also, many missed the people and the amenities that they had known before, and the support network that existed all but vanished. Uprooting people can cause stress and depression.



Willy Russell's Aim

One of the playwright's aims is to show us that there are disadvantages to being poor and working class.

The failure to succeed in life is not because of a lack of ability, but a lack of opportunity. This can clearly be seen in Edward and Mickey.

We must ask ourselves whether this is still true in the 21st century.



Key themes

Social Class

The contrast between two different social classes forms the heart of the play. The leading characters can be seen to be social stereotypes, presented dramatically in order to emphasise certain important differences in social class. Russell does this to show the unfairness that it results in.

Education

This theme 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 takes on 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 only acquire unskilled work and has to rely on the State for housing. Compare her with Mrs Lyons who similarly, despite presumably a middle-class education, is 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.

Nature vs. Nurture

The 'nature versus nurture' debate is exemplified through Mickey and Eddie. They are 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 concept of twins 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 of Margaret Thatcher's right wing conservative government, who claimed that everyone who wanted to work hard could be successful.

Fate and destiny

Each of the leading 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.

Growing Up

Life, for the children, is shown to be a carefree game in Act One. However the pressures of growing up in different backgrounds and educational systems are shown to bring problems later on.

It is the different experience of growing up that ends the friendship between Edward and Mickey. For example after Mickey loses his job Edward tries to be positive about his situation but Mickey tells Edward that he cannot understand living on the dole. He says that Edward hasn't had to grow up like him, to face the difficulties of the adult world and that they don't have anything in common any more.

Research the time the play was set in Liverpool

Act one 1950's

Act two 1970/s

Mrs Johnstone

Appearance:



Key events in the play that link to Mrs Johnstone:

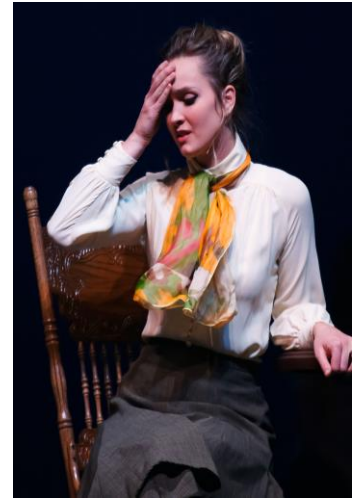
Describe how you would play her physically and vocally in act 1?

Describe how you would play her physically and vocally in act 2?

Important themes that Mrs Johnstone links to:

Mrs Lyons

Appearance:



Key events in the play that link to Mrs Lyons:

Describe how you would play her physically and vocally in act 1?

Describe how you would play her physically and vocally in act 2?

Important themes that Mrs Lyons links to:

Mickey

Appearance:



Key events in the play that link to Mickey:

Describe how you would play him physically and vocally in act 1?

Describe how you would play him physically and vocally in act 2?

Important themes that Mickey links to:

Edward

Appearance:



Key events in the play that link to Edward:

Describe how you would play him physically and vocally in act 1?

Describe how you would play him physically and vocally in act 2?

Important themes that Edward links to:

Linda

Appearance:



Key events in the play that link to Linda:

Describe how you would play her physically and vocally in act 1?

Describe how you would play her physically and vocally in act 2?

Important themes that Linda links to:

Sammy

Appearance:

Key events in the play that link to Sammy:



Describe how you would play him physically and vocally in act 1?

Describe how you would play him physically and vocally in act 2?

Important themes that Sammy links to:

Narrator

Appearance:

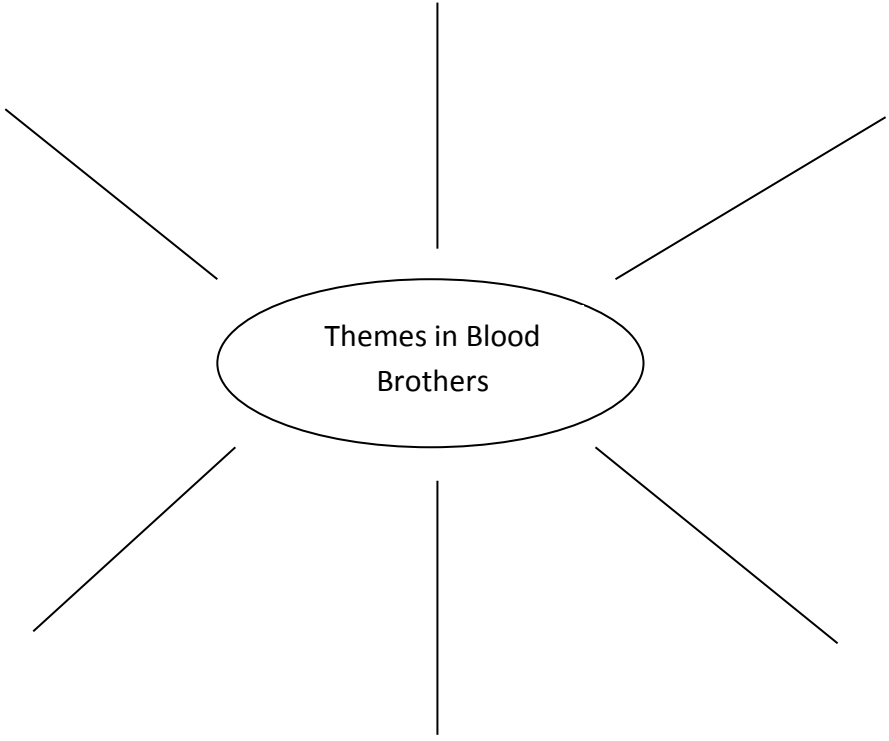


Key events in the play that link to Narrator:

Describe how you would play him physically and vocally in act 1?

Describe how you would play him physically and vocally in act 2?

Important themes that the Narrator links to:



Costume influences

Act 1

The blouse was fashionable during the 1950s, worn with skirts or pants. Many blouses were sleeveless or had very short sleeves. By the late 1950s, the long, slim look had returned. Long skirts or dresses were popular, often worn with short jackets.

Working class families will have handed down clothing from siblings as they were unable to afford new. They may have bought clothes larger so they last longer as children grow up.

The costume in the show is very different from class to class. Mrs Lyons wears gloves and layers as she can afford to do so, where as Mrs Johnston wears a dull coloured pinny.

Gloves and neck scarves were trendy in late 1950's and Mrs Lyons who is keen to keep up appearances may have many of these and wear them on a daily basis.

Act 2

Early 1960s Fashion- Jackie O' Style.
Late '60s Fashion and the "Baby Doll" Dress.
Fall 1960 Dress in a Similar Shape as Most of the '50s.
Bold Colours, Short "Mini" Shift Dresses

Boys

Leather jackets as the rock bands such as Bay City Rollers influenced this.

In some working class families there was a revival of Teddy Boy clothing with exaggerated 1950's big jackets.

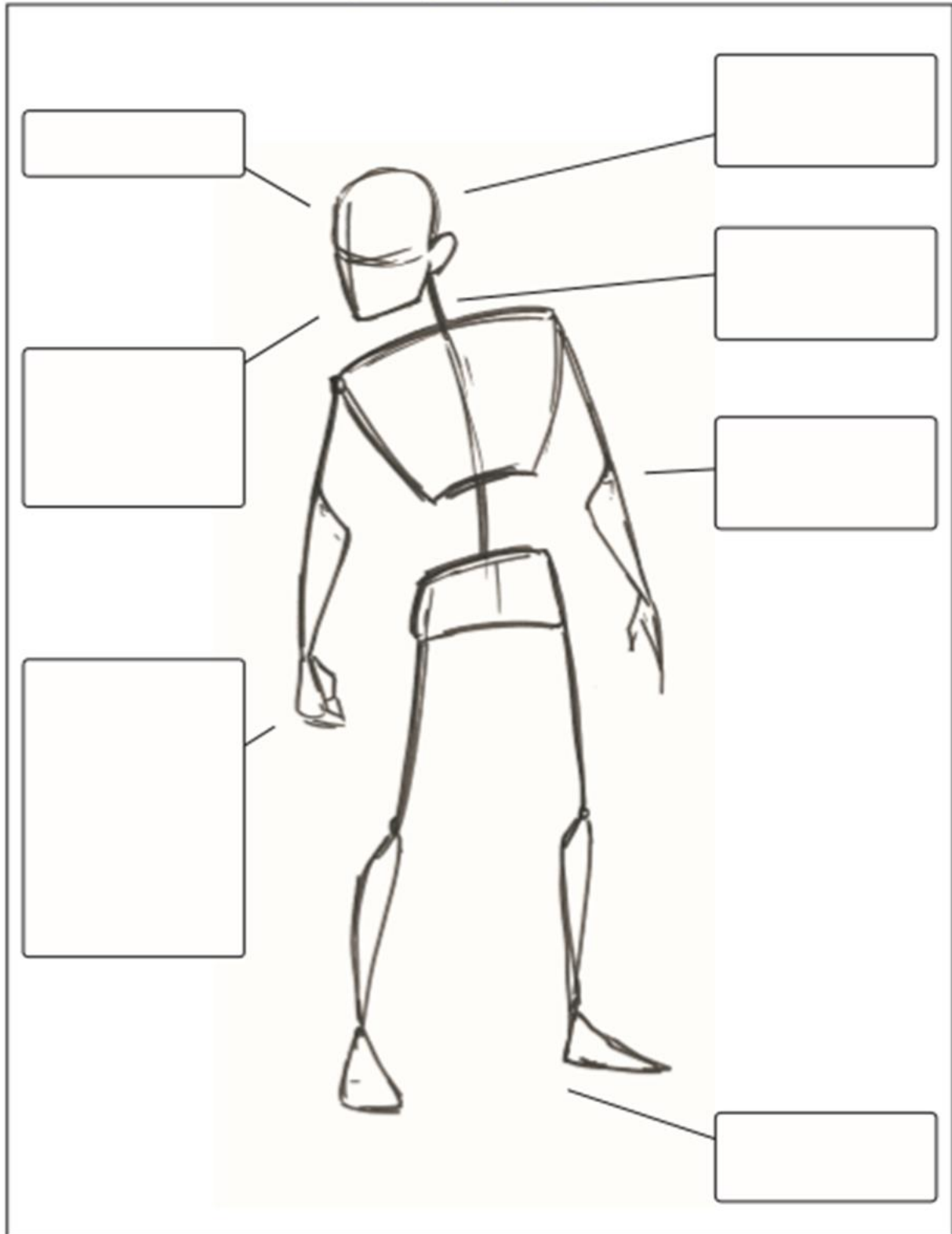
Top tips

- Always link back to the context of the play- how will your costume reflect what the play is about?
- Explain why you made your choices. For example bright colours because he has an outgoing personality. For Sammy heavy boots which would make him seem more intimidating or dangerous.
- Do they take pride in themselves? Why?

Sammy

AQA GCSE DRAMA

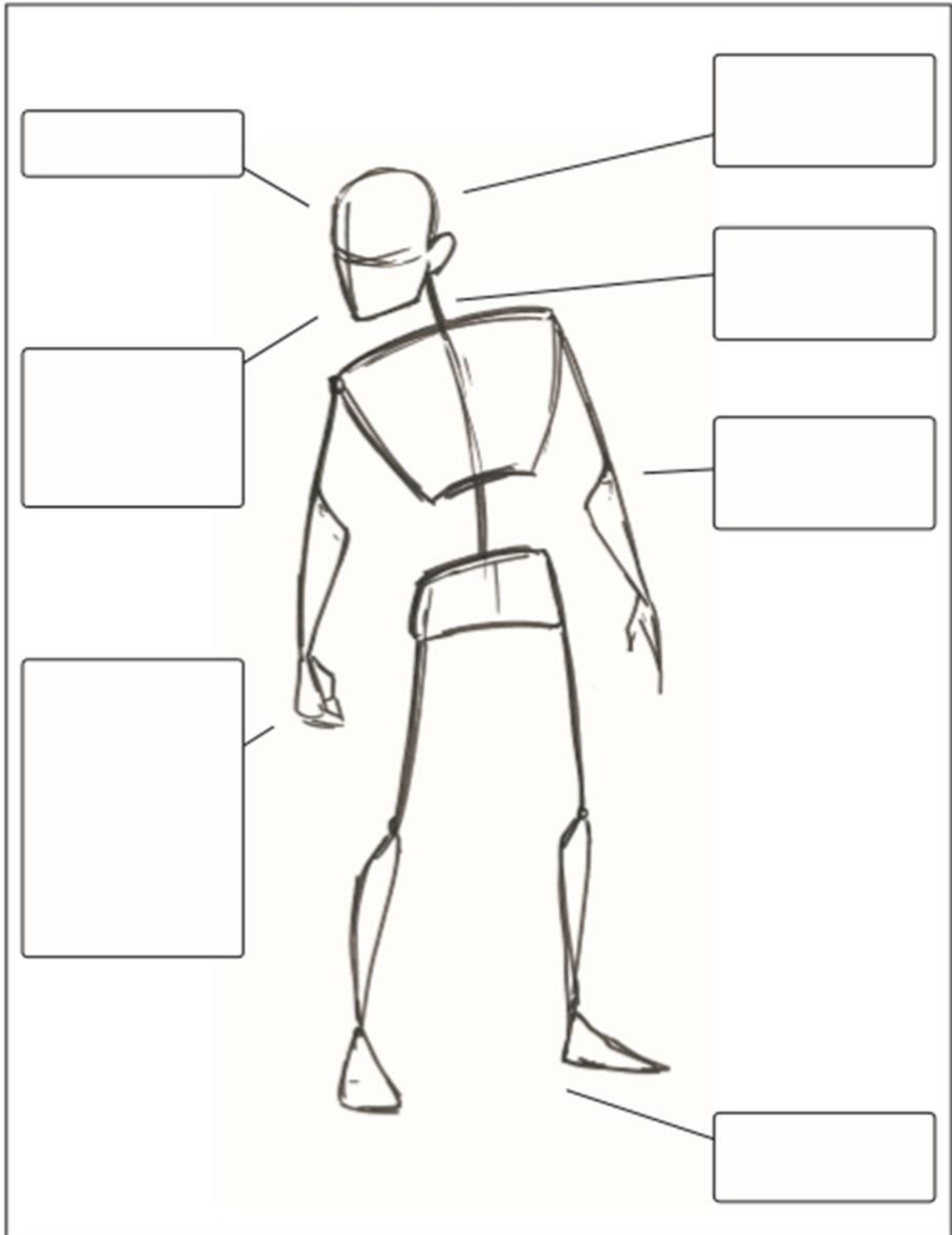
Costume, hair and make-up design inspired by context



Linda

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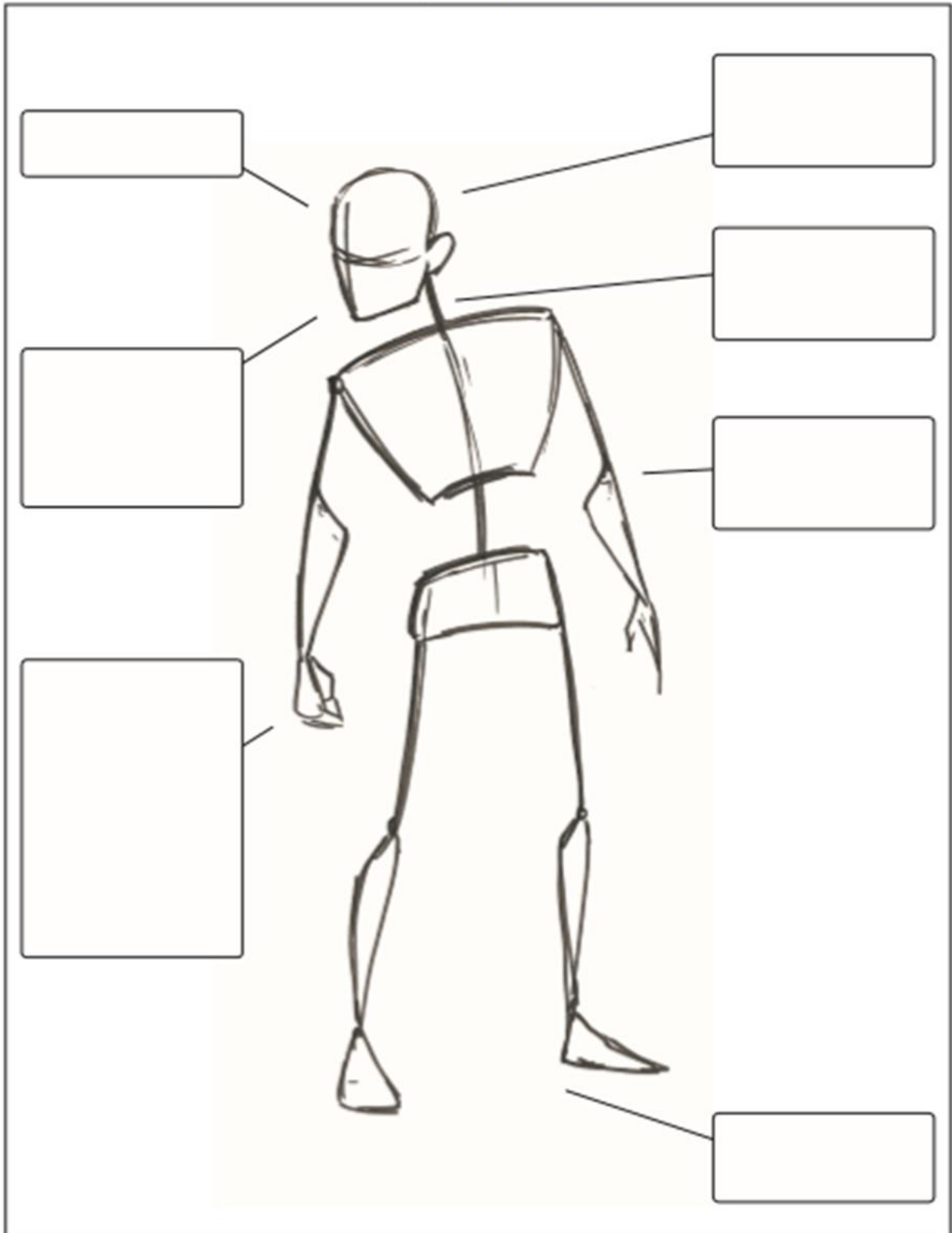
Costume, hair and make-up design inspired by context



Narrator

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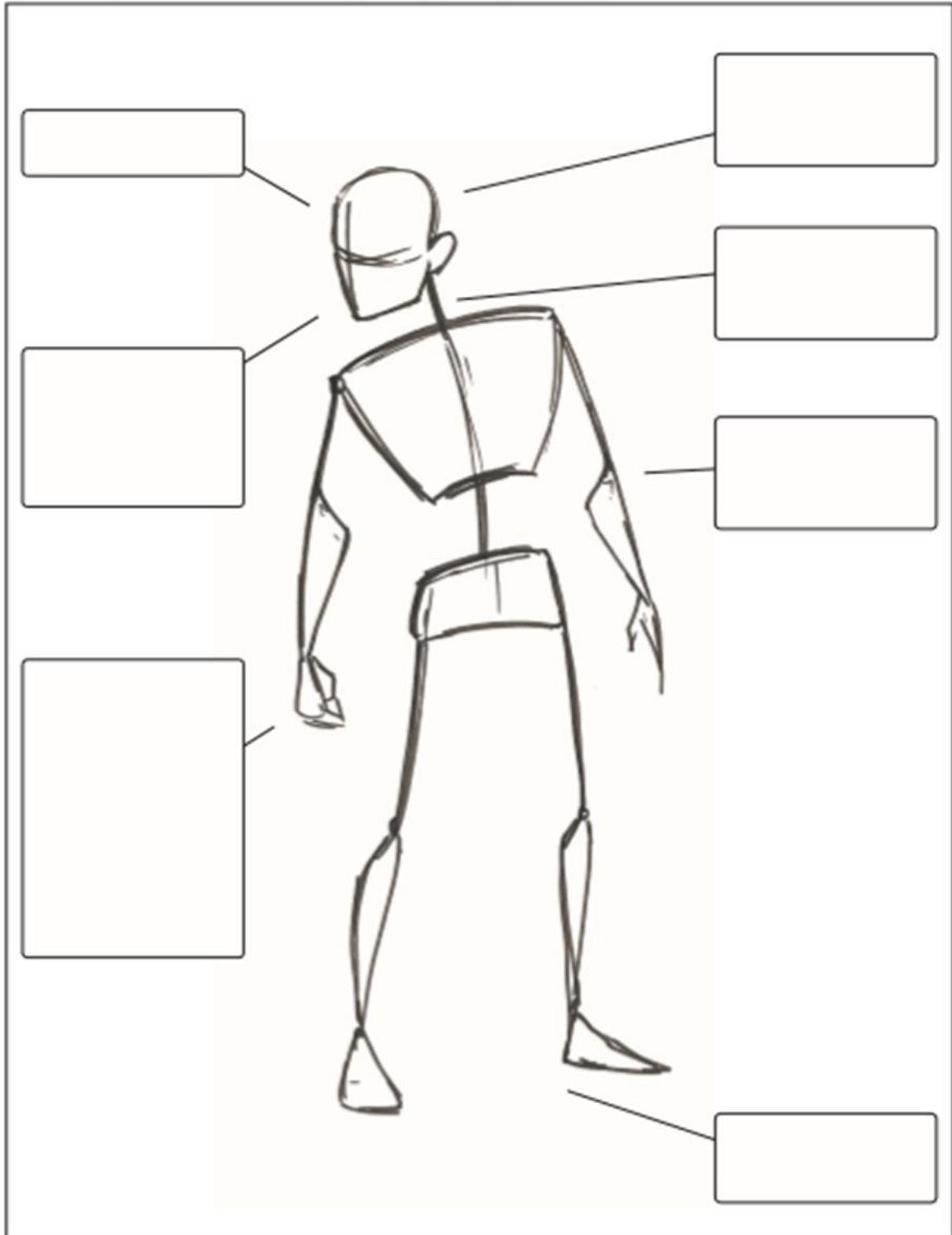
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Mickey

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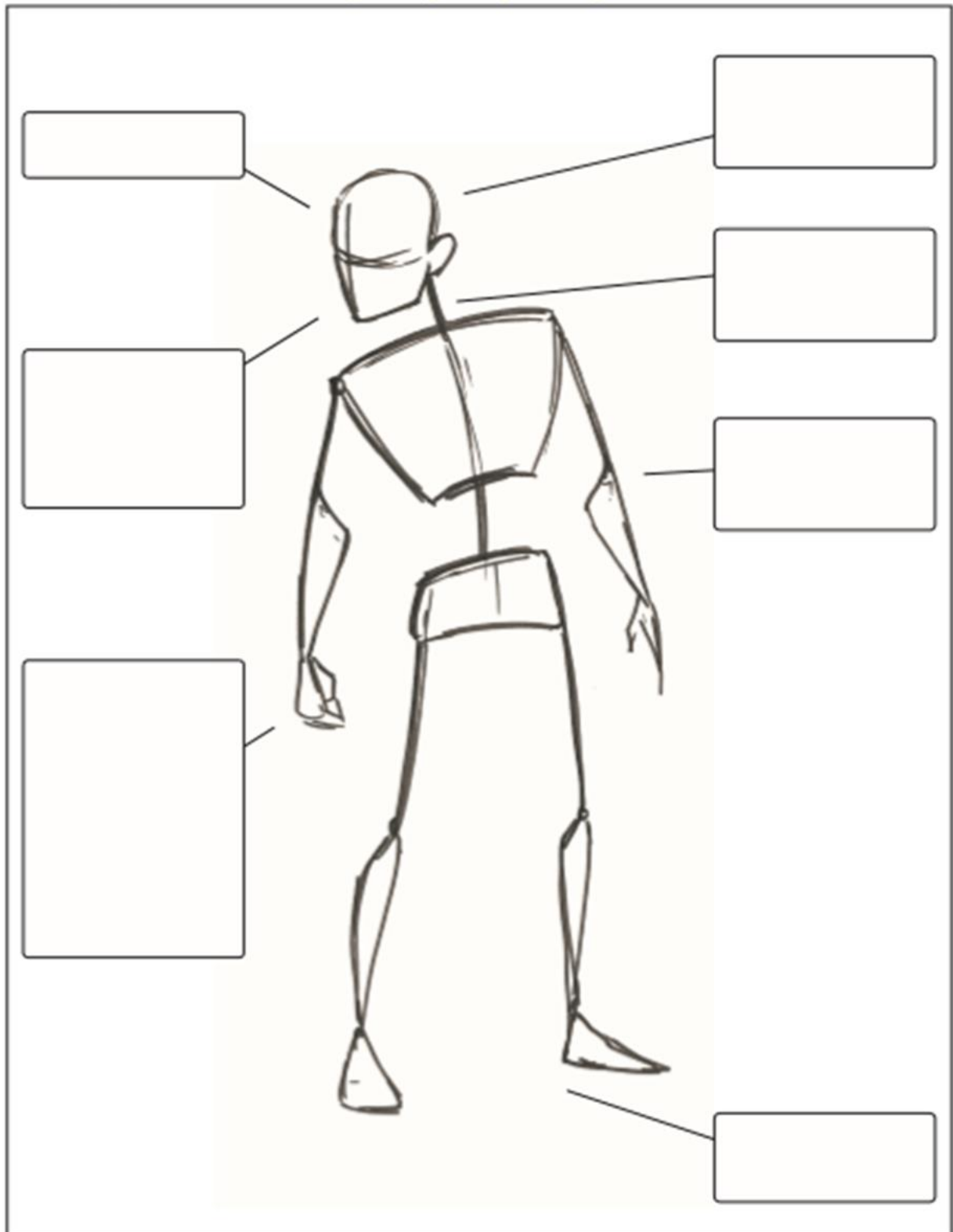
Costume, hair and make-up design inspired by context



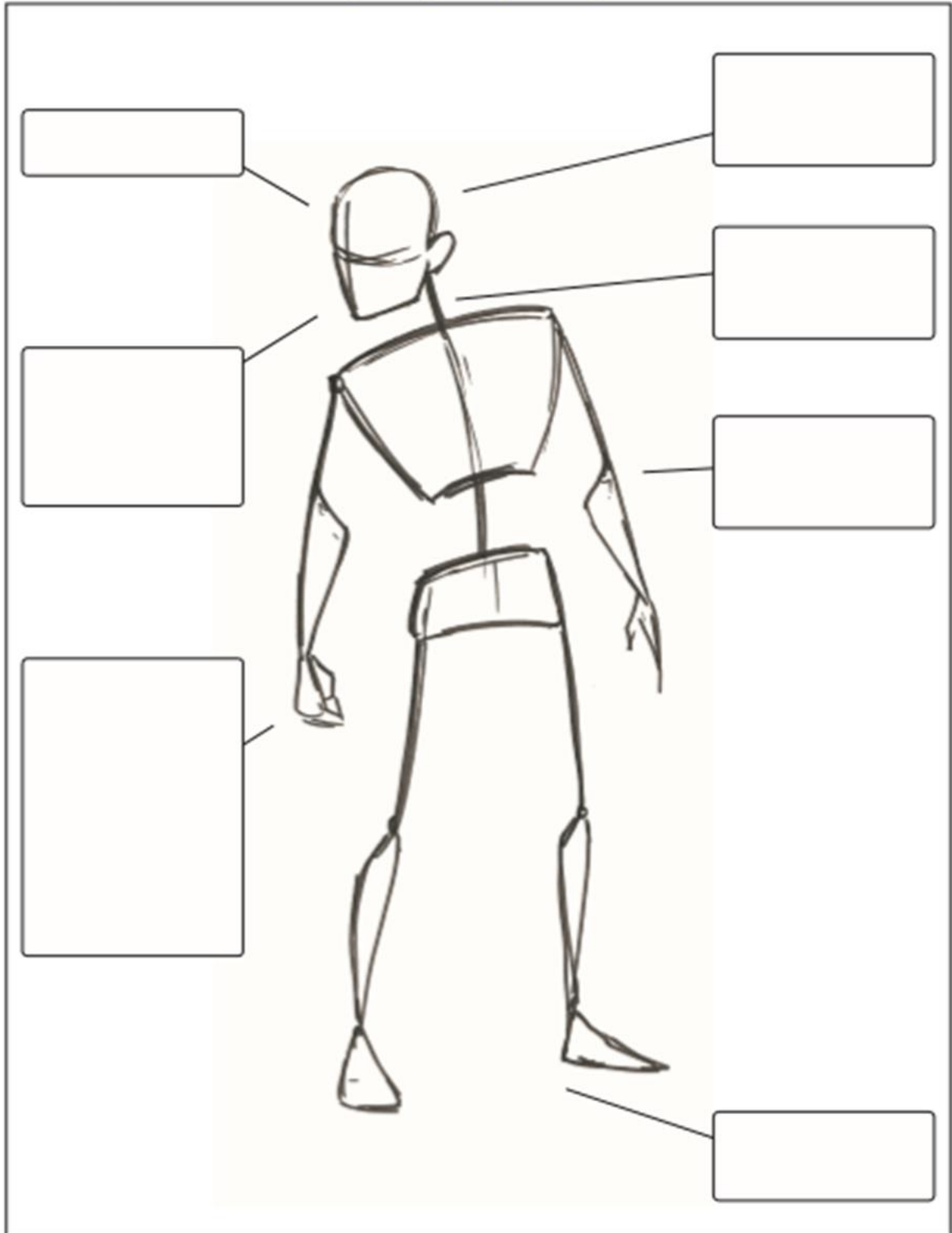
Eddie

AQA GCSE DRAMA

Costume, hair and make-up design inspired by context



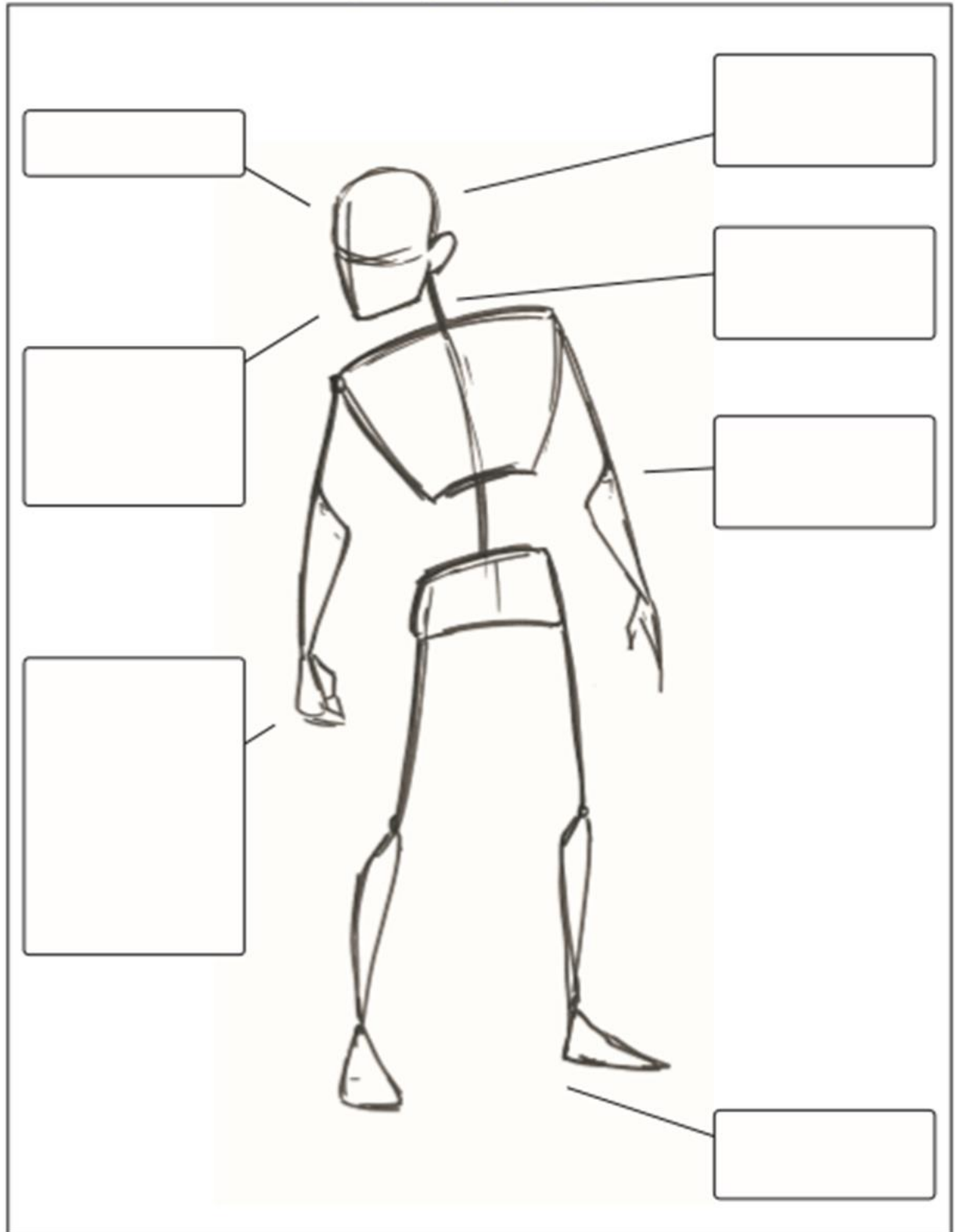
Costume, hair and make-up design inspired by context



Mrs Lyons

AQA GCSE DRAMA

Costume, hair and make-up design inspired by context



Things to think about when discussing set for Act 1 :

- What is there? Why is it there? Link back to the context of the play, year, area it is set in.

- What are the main colours used and why?

- Are there any props? What do they symbolise or present?

- What key pieces of furniture may you use? Paintings in Mrs Lyons/ Bins in Mrs Johnstone

- What backdrop would you have and why? Consider the setting and the fact both houses are in view

Things to think about when discussing set for Act 2 :

- What is there? Why is it there? Link back to the context of the play, year, area it is set in.

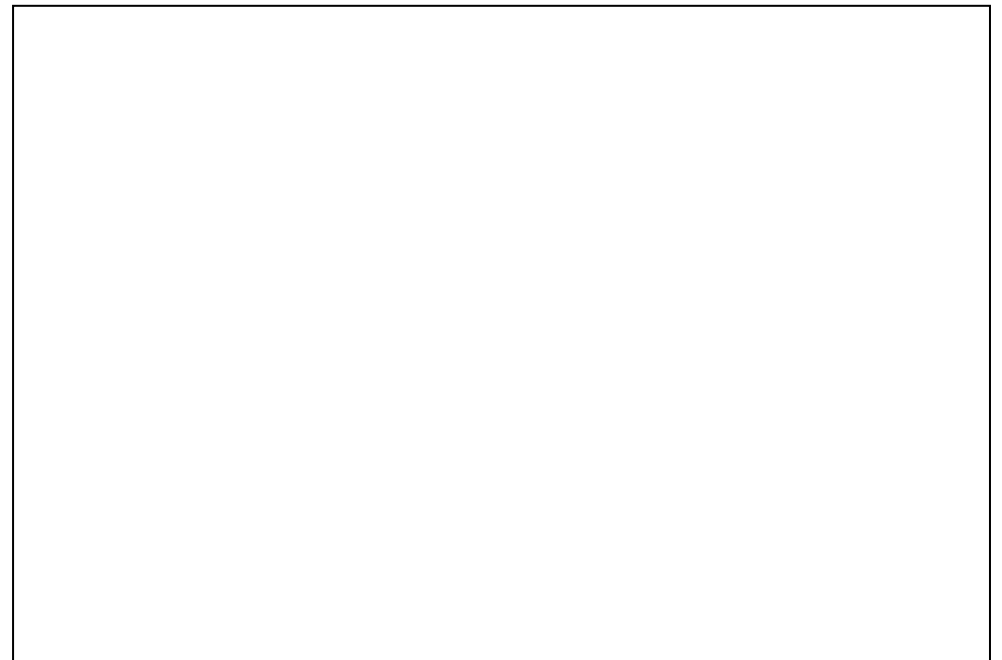
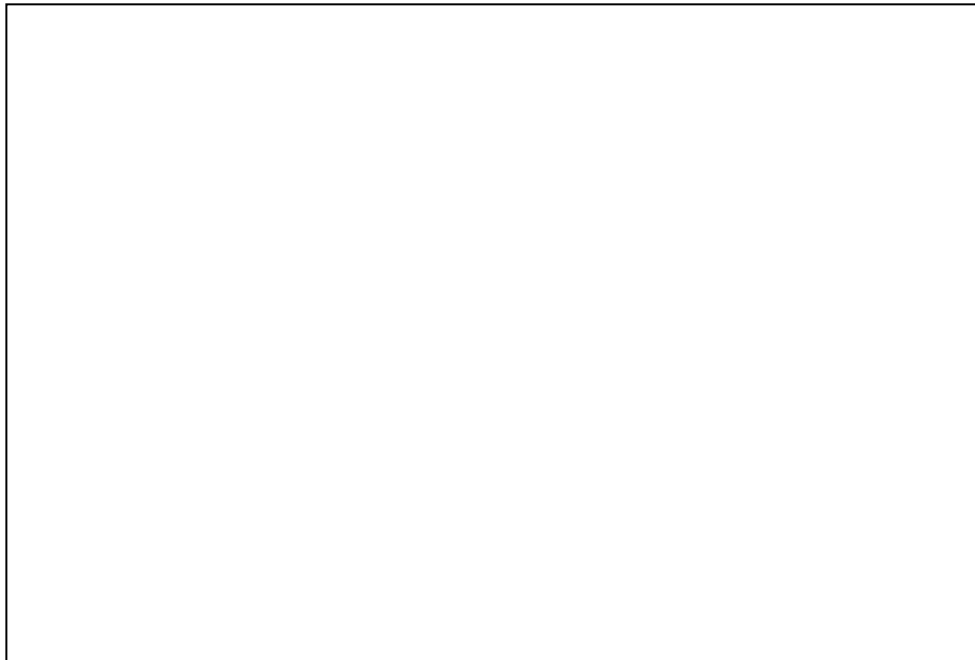
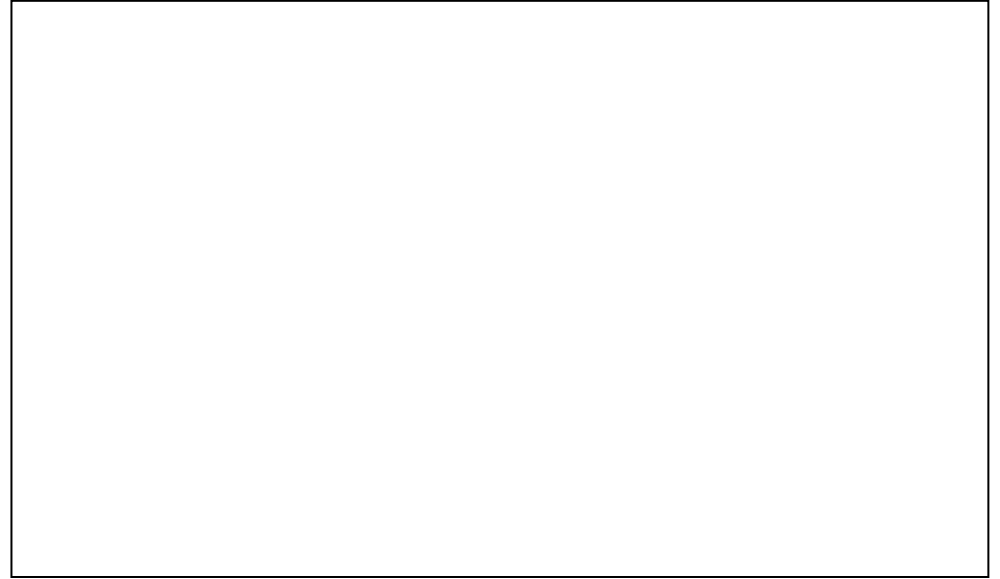
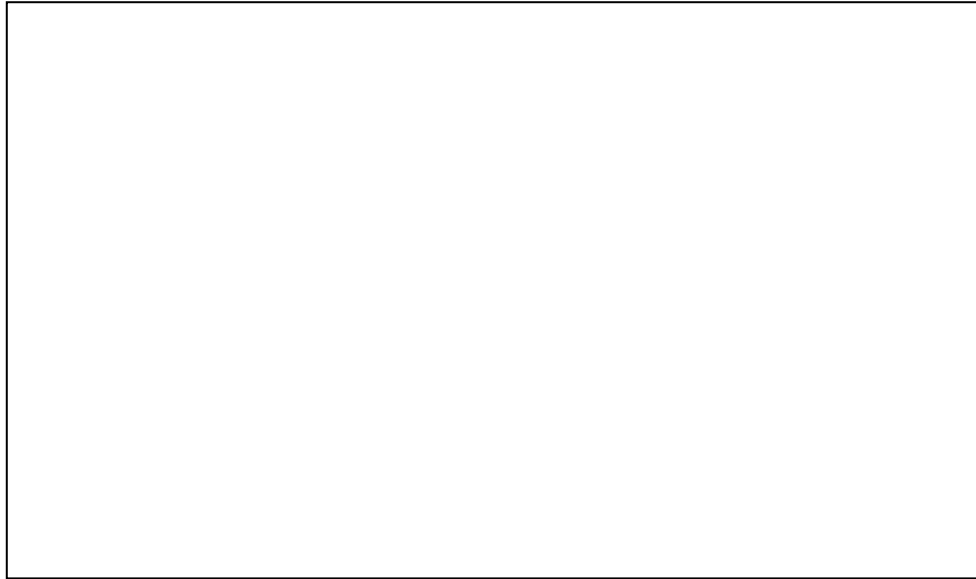
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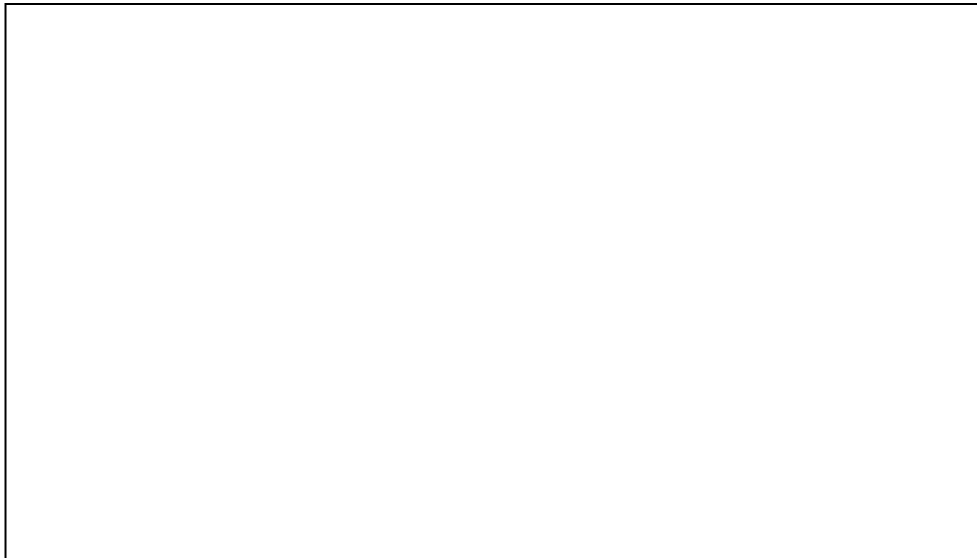
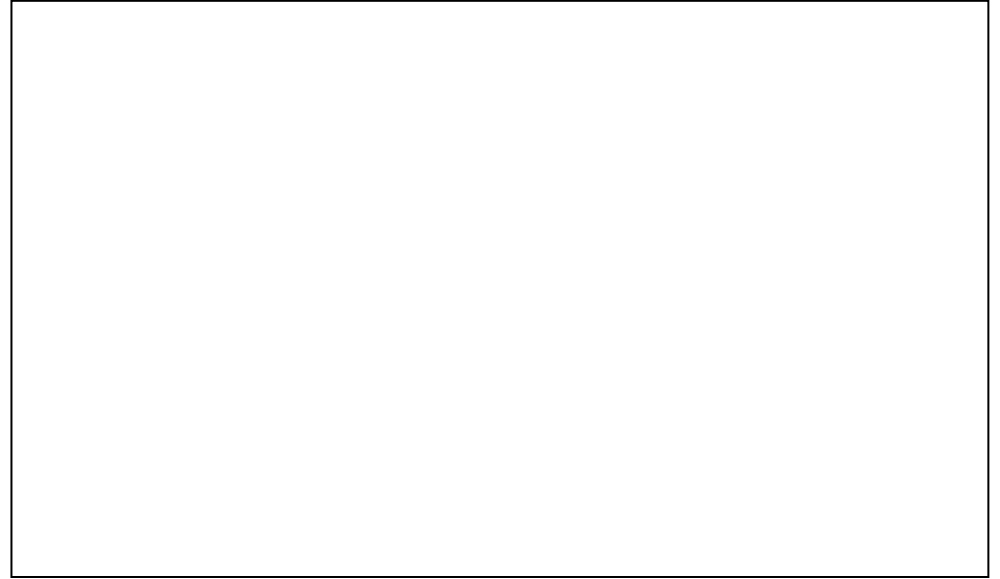
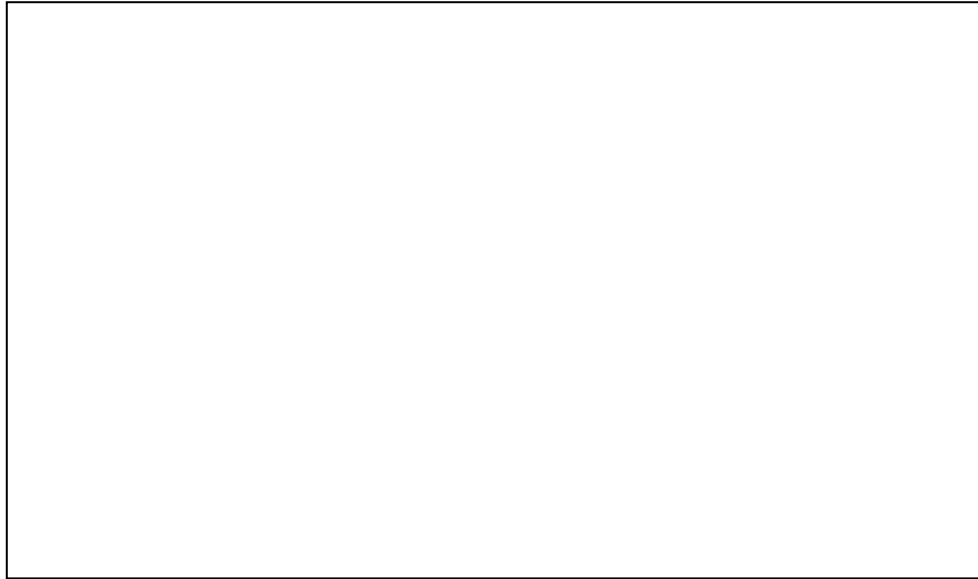
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- What backdrop would you have and why? Consider the setting and the fact both houses are in view

Think about how you would light some of the scenes:



Think about how you would light some of the scenes:



How can we use our acting skills to create?

Tension-

Empathy-

Comedy-

Surprise-