**GCSE Drama**

**Character Revision – DNA by Dennis Kelly**

Adam is the innocent victim of bullying and eventual murder in the play. There is a suggestion that he is from a lower social class. His character suggests both a Christian religious allegory and a primitive sacrifice.

Brian is an emotionally sensitive and relatively innocent boy. He is the least willing character to lie and the one who is most coerced and bullied into doing so. He suffers severe physiological disturbances because he has lied and eventually becomes delusional.

Cathy takes pleasure in violence. She plants the DNA evidence that frames the postman and finds Adam in the woods. She is cold and callous, showing no signs of guilt for the lives the group take or wreck. Phil turns to Cathy to carry out the murder of Adam. By the end of play Cathy is ‘running things’.

Danny is the most academic of the gang and has ambitions to be a dentist. Danny has a self-serving agenda, ‘How am I gonna get references?’, and ‘Dentists don’t get mixed up in stuff like this.’ he whines. Danny is ultimately a passive member of the group who will do as he is told by the leader.

Jan and Mark are always seen together. They open each section of DNA and work like a chorus in an ancient Greek drama. They convey the cruelty of the taunting of Adam. They inform us of the feral, brutal and pack-like behaviour of which the teenage gang is capable.

John Tate is an important contrast to Phil, and his leadership wanes as Phil’s becomes more powerful. The frequent false starts and hesitations in his speech suggest insecurity and from the start of the play he has to remind others of his authority. His vocabulary suggests he is from a more privileged background. John Tate states that he finds the events stressful and eventually disappears from the play. We hear that ‘He won’t come out of his room’, and ‘He’s joined the Jesus Army’ suggesting he has made an escape from the dreadful events.

Leah’s character acts as the group’s conscience asking questions about the morality of the group’s behaviour, “What have we done Phil?” Both talkative and curious Leah seems driven to ask questions, about herself, about animals and humans, and about the world. Leah speculates on the qualities of chimps and bonobos, and the position of human kind in the universe. She concludes that humans are the ‘anomaly’ She is ‘scared’ and ‘ashamed’ of the ‘brutal terror’ that people are living with. Leah is loyal and generous and has an instinct to defend Phil by claiming joint responsibility. Leah does not participate in any of the bullying or cruelty directly but in spite of her ability to think intelligently she is very much part of the group, often looking up to Phil. It isn’t until late in the play that she loses his influence. Leah is a deeply sympathetic character, partly because of her humility and thoughtfulness, but also because of the personal struggle she undergoes during the play.

Lou’s character establishes a tone of apprehension and fatalism. Her continuous references to the trouble the gang are in keep the tension level high. In particular her repeated line, ‘we’re screwed’, becomes a darkly comic catchphrase. She is quick to blame others calling, for example, Mark a ‘dick’ for framing the postman. Lacking a moral compass she is quick to blame others, she tends to be fickle, and follows the decisions of others.

Phil - In her review in The Times, Libby Purves refers to Phil as a ‘psychopathic ringleader’, implying that some sort of mental imbalance lies behind his criminal behaviour. Phil is most often seen away from the group with Leah. Enigmatic and silent he is often seen eating or drinking some kind of junk food or snack. Although he says he is ‘making it up’ as he goes along, Phil’s plan to cover up Adam’s disappearance reveals his breath-taking capacity to think ahead. Phil is an extreme pragmatist, reacting and responding to events when it is needed, but otherwise choosing to remain impassive. Phil is a fatalist and sees everything as inevitable, and humans as powerless. He shrugs in answer to the question, ‘How do you feel?’, almost as if he has no feelings at all, or certainly does not feel it is worthwhile voicing them. By the end of the play Phil spends his time ‘staring at nothing’. He has distanced himself from the group, and is unresponsive to Richard’s plea, ‘Come back to us’. More uncommunicative than ever, Phil seems deeply unhappy locked into the silence of isolation.

Richard has a relatively high status within the group. He doesn’t back down to John Tate ‘You shouldn’t threaten me John’. In spite of this, he is willing to accept Phil’s authority. He twice takes Brian off to fulfil Phil’s orders. When things go wrong, Richard becomes helpless, worried about going to prison, and needs Phil to suggest a way forward. By the end of the play Richard has taken the place of Leah hankering for Phil’s attention. Like Leah, Richard brings news of the other characters and opens wider perspectives, giving an invitation to stand back and reflect on human behaviour.