

DNA Dennis Kelly: Knowledge Organiser

Plot		
Todorov's Narrative Theory	Act 1	Mark and Jan discuss that someone is 'dead' and this throws the audience into the middle of the action. Leah talks and Phil eats. Leah wants answers to know what Phil is thinking. John Tate is clearly stressed and ties to ban others using the word 'dead'. He tries to keep control over the group by using fear and threats. Richard threatens his leadership but this is suppressed. When Mark and Jan arrive they explain to the group their version of events leading up to Adam falling into the grille. They try to justify their vicious attack on him by saying he was laughing. Phil finally speaks and devises a plan to frame a non-existent person. Leah speaks about bonobos being our nearest relatives. 'Chimps are evil. They murder each other...they kill and sometimes torture each other to find a better position within the social structure' (p26). This could be seen as the author's voice coming through about how he feels about the nature of bullies.
	Act 2	The audience learn that someone is 'not going'...this is a reference to Brian not going to the police station. Leah is still trying to gain Phil's attention. This time she talks about the nature of happiness. She shows him a Tupperware container and says it is Jerry. She describes how she has killed him. The police have found a man that fits the description of the man that Phil concocted because Cathy used her 'initiative' to find a man that matched the description. The plan has gone wrong. Brian is refusing to go into the police station to identify the man who is being framed. Phil threatens him with being taken up to the grille if he doesn't go. Brian goes. Leah tries to get Phil's attention again. This time she has déjà vu.
	Act 3	By Act 3 Scene 3 Cathy is 'second in command' as she is charged with killing Adam. A conversation takes place between her and Phil and despite Leah's attempts to be heard, she is ignored by them both (p58) Phil: (to Cathy): "Do you understand?" Leah: "Understand what?" Cathy: "Yeah, I do."
	Act 4	Jan and Mark reveal someone has 'gone'. This turns out to be Leah. Richard tries to convince Phil to re-join the group. He tries to gain his attention in similar ways to Leah. Phil does not speak. He also does not eat. Leah's departure has clearly affected him. Richard tells him what has happened to the rest of the group. By Act 4 Scene 2 Richard appears to have taken the place of Leah as he sits in the field with Phil. His speech/ monologue takes the same structure as Leah's. He seemingly talks about something unrelated to the group, attempts something physical to gain Phil's attention (walking on his hands), then brings his thoughts back to the actual situation they are in by discussing what has happened to the group.

Characters	
Mark & Jan	
These characters act as the 'chorus' or narrators, a dramatic technique transposed from Greek Tragedies. Traditionally, a chorus would act as the moral compass of a play however; Mark and Jan lack these qualities demonstrating the warped sense of humanity within the play. Mark and Jan are responsible for the events surrounding the bullying of Adam that lead to him falling into the grille. From p20 – 23 we are given a detailed description of the events that take place. Mark and Jan appear to be trying to justify their actions in this scene. Mark: "We were having a laugh, weren't we..." (p20). This phrase is repeated several times. They also convince themselves that Adam is actually enjoying the bullying. Mark: "Oh yeah, Adam he was laughing harder than anyone." (p21). Laughing forms a trope throughout their justifications however, it is also punctuated with other words such as, 'terrified', 'crying', 'stuffed out cigarettes', 'punch him', 'pegged a stone'. We get the impression that Mark and Jan might also be younger members of the group/ less able to assert themselves.	
Leah	Phil
In a number of scenes, (pages 10–12, 26–28, 30–32, 41–43, and 46–48) we are presented with an unrequited relationship between Leah and Phil exemplifying her insecurity and desire for some response from Phil which is seared through the text. Her speeches are virtually monologues as there is no response from Phil. Leah is a moral character and tries to reason with many of the characters. She is sensible and able to think for herself and speak her mind. However, she still falls under the leadership of Phil as she is not strong enough to alter the opinions and actions of anyone in the group. We are given no back ground information to any of the characters and much of what we understand is due to inference. However, Leah reveals that her and Phil have actually known Adam a very long time and pleads with him to help Adam, not harm him. Leah: "It's Adam, Phil, Adam! We used to go to his birthday parties, he used to have that cheap ice cream and we used to take the piss, remember?" (p58)	Although on stage in many scenes, Phil rarely speaks. Usually his action involves eating (ice-cream/Starburst/waffles, etc.). Although quiet for a long time, Phil clearly considers everyone's words and actions before he speaks. He gives calm and considered instructions to each member of the group as he assigns roles and tasks for them to complete. This makes him appear callous and nihilistic. A key quote that justifies his actions: Phil: "I'm in charge. Everyone is happier. What's more important; one person or everyone?" Phil has controlling/ reassuring body language. When addressing Lou on p57, the stage directions state that he, 'Places a hand on her shoulder, smiles, warm, reassuring' Phil: "Everything is going to be fine"
John Tate	Cathy
John Tate only appears in Act 1 Scene 3. He leads through using fear to control others. However, he is visibly falling apart during Act 1 Scene 3 as he panics and is unable to control those around him or the situation. He tries to ban the word, 'dead,' he says he will 'bite their face. Or something. ' if anyone uses the word again. The challenge to his leadership by Richard causes him further insecurity and the only way he knows how to lead is through fear, which he employs by threatening Lou, Danny and Richard. His words are very patronising as he talks down to each character – John Tate to Brian: "you crying piece of filth"	From very early on in the play, Cathy is shown to have no remorse about the groups' actions. She finds the situation 'exciting' and 'better than ordinary life' (p16). Her excitement grows when she is asked by the TV for an interview. Her position within the group rises throughout the play as she becomes closer/ more relied on by the leader. By the end of the play we learn that Cathy is now in charge and appears to have a sadistic nature. Phil has left the group so she assumes the leader role she seems to have been craving.
Lou	Danny
Lou will follow whoever the leader is at the time. She is controlled by fear (see Act 1 Scene 3). She is afraid of John Tate but also of 'Richard, maybe' (p13). Lou has no complicated speeches but instead speaks using simple sentences or short phrases. Phrases such as 'We're screwed' (p34) make her appear young/not assertive and relies on being given instruction. She also appears to believe the lies the group have created (p35)	Danny is presented as a sensible character and appears as an opposite to the rest of the characters. He has plotted his course through education to achieve this and nothing can interfere with this plan...until the death of Adam. None of the other characters refer to their plans and the consequences of their actions on their lives or the lives of others. Finally in this scene, he reacts with shock to Phil's suggestion at taking Brian up to the grille if he doesn't follow orders, "Is he serious?" (p40).

Themes
Gangs
Control
Violence
Innocence & Justice
Humanity
Power
Morality
Sadism
Guilt

Vocabulary
Coercion
Contemporary Society
Propp Character Theory
Suspense
Machiavellian Leadership
Dictatorial Control
Nihilism
Chimp Theory
Sociolect
Cultural Immersion
Narrative Perspectives
Aposiopesis
Aporia
Peripheral Characters
Morality
Culpability
Crescendo
Authorial Reticence
Duologue
Proxemics
Psychopath
Social Hierarchy
Retribution
Responsibility

Brian	Richard
<p>The other characters must see him as weak and vulnerable and someone the police believe could be a victim. In order for their story to stick, the police must believe this. Brian is bullied and pushed around by all of the characters. Richard hates him and protests when told by Phil he should look after him. Cathy slaps him. Phil threatens him with the same fate as Adam if he does not follow orders (p40). He cannot deal with his guilt and is prescribed medication to help him cope. He is seen to revert to a childlike state of 'play' by Act 3 Scene 3 as his way of dealing with the events.</p>	<p>Richard first appears to be a strong character and potentially someone who is able to be a leader of the group. Lou is scared of him and he presents a challenge to John Tate's leadership. Although he stands up to John Tate (<i>You shouldn't threaten me John'</i> p17), he is eventually put in his place when John Tate turns the entire group against Richard by telling them to choose sides. (Act 1 Scene 3 Phil instructs Richard to take Brian to the police station but has to repeat his instructions to him (p41)</p>

Intertextuality & Dramatic Technique

Religious Allegory	In Kelly's play, the teenagers are able to exploit a blind belief in the scientific 'evidence' provided by DNA. The character's name and what happens to him are suggestive both of the first man, Adam, and of Jesus Christ, the son of God and sacrificial lamb. Christians believe Christ died for the sins of mankind, he is often depicted with wound through his hands and feet drawing parallels with the gang stubbing out cigarettes on the soles of Adam's feet (p22).
<i>When I was Joe</i> by David Keren	Ty witnesses a stabbing, his own life is in danger from the criminals he's named, and he and his mum have to go into police protection. Following similar themes of gang violence and the vulnerability of young people When I was Joe complements the gritty reality depicted in DNA. While all cases might not be as extreme as Ty's or that in DNA, it does happen, and innocent people's lives are ruined, altered and forever changed.. Without books like these, people could very easily forget what's happening even as close to home as the school their child attends.
<i>Cannibal Kids</i> by Kate Tempest	Tempest's poem is moving and visceral. Portraying these "bitter and drained" youngsters who have their "wings clipped. [As] they find eagle's wings in the derelict brotherhood of gang life." she draws upon the restlessness and intense desire for belonging demonstrated in DNA wherein their suffering at the hands of each other make them hardened; they "carry their pain to the point of being painless" as they turn away from helping one another. Tempest strikes at the heart of DNA in saying "They don't know that kindness is courage" reinforcing Kelly's overarching themes of morality and humanity, or rather, the lack of it.
Friedrich Nietzsche	Broadly in critique of Christian morality and in affirmation of 'Death of God' phraseology, Nietzsche rightly foresaw that people need to identify some source of meaning and value in their lives, and if they could not find it in science, they would turn to aggressive desire to be united by group identity and other such salves. This mimics the 'mob mentality' within DNA and the desperate yearning to feel an affinity with others which ultimately leads to the sacrifice of values. Our fundamental drive is for power as realized in independence and dominance demonstrated in the grappling of position within the social hierarchy of the teenage group.
<i>King Lear</i> by William Shakespeare	King Lear is a drama of old age and family disintegration in which human life often appears meaningless and brutal...only Hamlet and Macbeth approach it in depicting such thorough devastation. This Nihilism is exemplified in the lines: "Nothing comes from nothing". In light of this pessimism and nihilism--the word "nothing" sounds like the tolling of a death knell throughout the play--has made the play seem the most existentially modern of the tragedies
Nihilism	The Nihilist interpretations are broadly based on Plato's theories of Epic Theatre of disconnection, detachment, disengagement, estrangement or alienation. Rather than emotionally empathising or

identifying with the main characters we become critical observers and respond rationally and intellectually, much like the stoic character of Phil.