



Pearson  
Edexcel

# GCSE (9–1) Drama

Prescribed Text Guide

*DNA*, Dennis Kelly

Issue 3 – August 2021  
update





## Contents

Summary .....	3
Characters.....	6
Context .....	9
Themes .....	11
Resources .....	13
Practical activities .....	14



## Prescribed edition for Component 3

*DNA*, Dennis Kelly – ISBN 97813518804-4 (Methuen Drama: student edition).

## Summary

Set in a street, a field and a wood, *DNA* follows a group of teenagers as they attempt to cover up their part in a bullying incident that leads to the apparent death of the victim, Adam. The play is in four ‘acts’ which each follow a similar structure, beginning with a duologue from Jan and Mark and then moving location to show the actions and interactions of the other characters. There are also a number of monologues from one character, to the silent and unresponsive Phil, often eating rather than reacting, largely completing each section.

Events regarding the ‘killing’ of Adam by the group are revealed vocally/ in flashback although the play begins with the revelation that ‘He’s dead’ in a duologue between Jan and Mark, two teenagers who serve as chorus figures within the play. The characters hatch a plan to get out of trouble and are thrown into chaos when Adam eventually returns from the dead. The characters are faced with difficult choices and must confront the consequences of their actions.

### One

#### *A Street/A Field/A Wood*

Mark and Jan discuss a mysterious death and the action moves between the groups of characters, introducing them and their take on the death of a boy.

It is revealed that this is Adam, a bullied victim of the gang. He is presumed dead after Mark and Jan tell about how they taunted and teased him and led him to a grille covering a deep shaft and threw stones at him as he walked across it and finally fell into the hole, presumed dead. Phil, a largely silent character who spends a lot of time eating and drinking, devises a plan to frame a non-existent person for Adam’s death. This plan involves stealing a jumper and a pair of shoes from Adam’s house, putting them in a plastic bag to avoid DNA contamination, then conspiring to make a stranger touch the jumper, and put it back into the plastic bag with his DNA on it. The stranger would thus be framed for the murder. Phil’s plan also involves having one of the gang members – Brian – telling his headteacher that a fat postman with bad teeth has exposed himself to him in the woods.

The section ends with Leah making a long speech about bonobos, which symbolically links to the group’s actions in bullying and apparently killing Adam. Phil does not respond. She ends section 1 by saying, several times, that they are all in trouble now.



## Two

### *A Street/A Wood/A Field*

Mark and Jan report that an unknown character, revealed later to be Brian, has said that 'He's not going'.

The action moves a wood where Leah is talking to a silent Phil about happiness and about Adam's disappearance. She asks him 'What have we done?' Jan and Mark enter and insist on talking.

The action moves once again to a field where the characters are increasingly worried about the situation. Although Phil created the imaginary 'fat postman with bad teeth' after Adam has been reported missing, the police have now found a man who fits the description. This is because Cathy, in an attempt to make the suspect as realistic as possible, found a postman who matched Phil's description, and contrived to have him pick up Adam's jumper when she dropped it. The plan has gone wrong, and an innocent man has been framed based on fake DNA evidence. Brian has been asked to go to the police station to identify the man, but he is scared, and refusing to do so. Phil threatens to kill him unless he helps them and Brian finally agrees.

The section ends with Leah and Phil, alone in a field. Leah explains her feeling that if you change just one thing, you can change the world. Phil refuses to answer Leah or respond despite her calling his name repeatedly.

## Three

### *A Street/A Field/A Wood*

The section begins with Jan and Mark revealing to the audience that Cathy has discovered Adam alive and living in the woods.

The action then moves to a field where Leah tells Phil. Phil prepares a waffle with butter and jam throughout this scene. Jan and Mark then enter and insist that Phil and Leah 'come with us'.

The characters are shown grouped around Adam who has clearly been affected by what has happened to him. He speaks haltingly and in a disjointed way and can barely remember his own name, although he does insist that he is not coming back. In a shocking twist, and to save themselves from having to reveal the truth of the gang's actions and plotting, Phil takes charge and demonstrates to Cathy using the oblivious Brian how to kill Adam with a plastic bag. Leah tries to reason with Phil, but he exits without responding.

The section ends with Leah and Phil alone on stage in a field. Leah begins to cry and storms off when Phil tries to comfort her.

## Four

### *A Street/A Field*

Jan and Mark begin the section, as in all four parts of the play, revealing that (presumably) Leah has gone having moved schools.

The location moves to the field where Richard and Phil are in brief conversations about what has happened to the others. He ends with a philosophical statement about not being



alone in the universe. Phil remains silent and refuses to comment or react, even when Richard asks him to 'Come back, Phil'.

The play ends with Richard and Phil sitting in silence.



## Characters

### Phil

Phil is often silent when present, although he does spend a lot of time eating and drinking and listening to what is going on around him – even if he does not appear to be doing so when, for example, addressed by Leah. When he gives his instructions to the gang, he is cold and callous in the planning of the cover-up and framing, but he also has an air of authority that makes the others obey him.

Phil is a controlling character, and in the gang, this could be reassuring for the others – knowing the strength of character of the person who leads them. Although he ignores her for much of the play, when Leah finally leaves him, this is the only moment when he addresses her. He makes decisions for the gang, not all of which are accepted by all members and, in the final moments of the play he is seen with Richard – a Leah ‘substitute’, but the relationship is not the same as Phil is not eating.

### Leah

She is certainly insecure in her relationship with Phil – for much of the time they are together, she is attempting to get a response from him. She threatens to leave and, when she eventually does, it is in silence, with him calling after her.

Her monologues – for that is essentially what they are – use various tactics in her attempts to elicit a response from him. Although she is a member of the gang and therefore under Phil’s leadership, it is clear that she is intelligent – as in some of her monologues – and has a mind of her own – standing up to Phil over his response to Adam’s reappearance. It is unfortunate that she does not have the strength to convince others in the gang not to carry out Phil’s plans for Adam and her only course of action is to leave the gang.

Leah displays a sense of loyalty towards Adam – reminding Phil about how long they have known him, for example, and she is a voice of reason at times.

### Jan

With Mark, Jan is responsible for the bullying that leads to Adam falling through the grille. In her description of the events leading to this there is a sense of the cruelty of the actions. He always appears on stage with Mark and often acts a chorus figure.

### Mark

With Jan, Mark is responsible for the bullying that leads to Adam falling through the grille. He tries to justify what they did by saying that Adam was enjoying it. He always appears on stage with Mark and often acts a chorus figure.

### John Tate

John Tate only appears in section 1 and although he is a leader for a time, he is also shown as an insecure bully, using threats to dominate and control the group. However, in the aftermath to Adam’s ‘death’ the audience see him becoming overwhelmed by fear and panicking as he is unable to take control of the situation or the group. He tries to ban the word, ‘*dead*,’ and the challenge to his leadership by Richard, who is just trying to calm the others down, causes him further insecurity. When Jan and Mark reveal the full story, John asks the group what they should do, and Phil takes the lead instead. There is no further



mention of John Tate until the end of the play, when Richard tells Phil and the audience that John Tate has found God.

### **Danny**

Danny is shown as a generally balanced character with a clear sense of consequences and of the future, beyond school. Whereas none of the other characters refer to their plans for the future or display any sense of the consequences of their actions on either their future lives or on the lives of others. He has the ambition of training to be a dentist and is seen by the audience as most anxious and upset when he feels this ambition is threatened by that actions of others.

### **Richard**

Richard first appears to be a balanced, authoritative character. Lou says that she is scared of him and triggered the confrontation between Richard and John Tate. Richard initially stands his ground, but he is judged as less capable by the group when asked to pick sides. He subsequently allows John Tate and then Phil to lead the group and demonstrates his feelings verbally, while continuing to do as he is told.

### **Lou**

Lou is a passive and often quiet character who, like Cathy in particular, is shown to follow whoever the leader is at the time. While she will always do as she is told, there is also a sense that she is controlled most effectively when she is afraid. She says that she fears John Tate and possibly Richard, creating insecurity in John Tate to panic and driving him to confront Richard. Lou generally speaks using simple dialogue, often agreeing with others, creating the clear sense of her as supporting character

### **Cathy**

Cathy can be seen as sadistic because he shows no remorse for the gang's actions and certainly finds the situation exciting and better than ordinary life.

It is clear, fairly early on, that she will carry out the wishes of the leader – whoever the leader is – and she enjoys the attentions of John Tate before Phil takes charge and she effectively becomes his deputy in the gang. She is asked to be interviewed on television – which adds to her excitement – with the thought of making money for it. It is Cathy who obtains DNA evidence from an actual postman who fits Phil's fictional description.

It is not clear whether this is accidental or deliberate but, looking at the play in its concluding moments, it is probably the case that she deliberately set out to frame the postman for Adam's 'death'. Her physical violence becomes more obvious – she slaps Brian, for example, and her tone of voice is often aggressive. She is enjoying the attention.

### **Brian**

Is easily led and is dominated by everyone, particularly Cathy. He is either the youngest or the weakest – or both – as he is the one chosen to report the fictitious incident to his headteacher as he is the one who they think is most likely to be believed. It is Brian who finds Adam living in the woods – and therefore sets in motion the chain of events that follows, although at some personal cost.



## Adam

His return is pivotal to the plot structure of the play, and it is important that his reasons for not going home after recovering from his fall through the grille are articulated effectively. He has had a blow to the head from the fall and his memory of events is weak and his speech is confused and disjointed. As already stated, it is important that this is articulated effectively in order for the subsequent events to be believable within the structure of the play – the normal reaction to falling through the grille and coming round again would be to go home or to seek help from others. Adam does neither of these things, so this must be explained by the blow to the head and this needs to be effectively portrayed for it to make sense to the audience.

The audience learns from Mark and Jan that Adam was enjoying the game they were playing, but there is no evidence of this in Adam's speech when Brian discovered him living in the woods and takes him to meet the others.





## Context to *DNA*

The original performance took place at the Cottesloe Theatre of the National Theatre in 2008. There were various other performances of the play at venues in the UK at around the same time.

Students are required to refer to the context **in which the text was created and first performed** as part of their response to sub-question (b)(i). This could be the social, political, context and/or the context to the **first performance**, which for this text **took place in 2008**. Contextual information relating to this may also be covered in sub-question (b)(ii) and (c). The following contextual information may be of support to students when preparing for these questions.

*DNA* was originally commissioned by NT Education as part of its Connections project, and was performed professionally by young actors, for a young audience at a range of venues and stages around the UK in 2008. Often performed subsequently by youth groups and schools/colleges, the play resonates in its accessibility for a younger audience and performers. The first production was staged ‘end on’ and the design made use of video projection to create the different locations, with minimal use of stage furniture and set items, creating seamless transitions between locations and suggesting the passing of time.

The play deals with a range of contemporary issues as seen through the eyes of its disaffected and alienated characters. None of them appears to be connected to anyone outside the play, and at times, even their connection with one another appears rather tenuous. We are told of events that happen ‘off stage’ and places the characters have been – school, the police station, for example – but the play is structured around their world of ‘*A Street/A field/A wood*’. They are outdoors, but do not appear to be at ease with nature, and it is interesting to note in a play written in 2007 the absence of the technology that now dominates most teenagers’ lives. It is certainly a play of its time and represents a particular view of teenagers but, in avoiding the obvious communication methods favoured by most teenagers, Dennis Kelly has, in fact, made *DNA* more of a timeless piece – and therefore less likely to date – than, for example, Enda Walsh’s *Chatroom* (2005) which, like Kelly’s play, was commissioned by NT Connections.

The characters’ names and genders are suggestions only and can be changed to suit performers, which makes their actions and reactions more important to the way the plot unfolds than their gender. The characters live within the world of the play and the events that brought them there, and they rarely comment on anything other than their immediate world and the complications of the relationships through which they explore it. Events outside their world – such as the bullying of Adam, or the collection of DNA, are reported in such a way that the audience is invited to question their accuracy as recounted by what are, on the whole, unreliable witnesses.

The play is divided into 4 sections, each of a similar structure and all centred round the same basic locations – making the staging of the play both simple and challenging, depending on the kind of stage space to be used. The episodes within the four sections are made up of confrontational situations, with, for example, Leah and Phil’s exchanges framed around her addressing him with no verbal response from him, creating exchanges that are constructed as a series of monologues. At other times – with Jan and Mark, for



example – it is as if two characters are speaking as one, completing each other's sentences as they describe what happened to Adam.

Lack of communication between characters not only helps to create powerful dramatic tension that often explodes into furious argument but is also indicative of many in our society who find it difficult to connect with others on a one-to-one basis or in telling a story can only do so through lines learned and repeated.

*DNA*, as a drama, takes the negativity and nihilism of a group of teenagers to a new level. We see no redeeming features in any of the characters – where there might have been a counterargument to Phil's plotting, the character is confined to his room, as in the case of John Tate, or moves schools, as in the case of Leah. Presenting this particular view of teenage life challenges audiences both to understand that there is a whole world of experience going on under our noses that we will never know about, and to recognise that the two boys who murdered James Bulger in 1993 were ten years old at the time – younger than any of the characters in Kelly's play.

As a result of the initial act of violence and also of Phil's solution to Adam's return, this play has provoked intense discussion about right and wrong and our responsibility for each other. It plays out almost like a Greek tragedy or a Shakespearean plot for modern times. In a society that is supposedly governed and driven by a moral code, there is nothing moral in the actions of these characters.

Kelly comments that he wrote the play about the idea of "whether it was right to sacrifice the individual for the many – this for me is the central question in the play– how many wrong things you can do for a greater purpose" rather than directly exploring the idea of teenage gangs. However, the concept of hooded teenagers as threatening and dangerous had become front page news several years before the play was first performed and might be seen an influence for audience and performers.



## Themes in *DNA*

Gender identity is an important theme within *DNA*. The characters' names and genders can be changed according to Kelly and this affects the dynamics of the gang and also the impact of individual actions on the audience. Kelly suggests that it does not matter whether the characters are male or female, that either sex is capable of carrying out these actions and of being affected by them. Being part of the gang is not about gender, but about an attitude that enables you to belong. An all-female, all-male or reversed-gender cast would enable an exploration of 21st-century gender identity.

*DNA* is often seen as being a play about gangs and belonging. In the episodic structure of the opening duologues, Kelly presents a build-up to the identity of the individuals in the gang before bringing them together to react to the news of Adam's death. They are seen in disparate pairings at first, and the nature of what they have done is revealed gradually through their reaction to the death of Adam, particularly in relation to the way the events are told by Jan and Mark.

John Tate attempts to ban the word 'death', resulting in an attempt by Richard to take control of the gang. The intervention of Phil – largely silent until this point – gives the plot its sinister twist and explores the nature of belonging and how far gang members are prepared to go to be part of the gang. Phil has not spoken up to this point, despite his girlfriend, Leah, attempting to engage him in conversation. Now he sets out a plan to shift the blame for Adam's death away from the group – with *DNA* as part of the cover.

Jan, in her description of the attack on Adam, appears to relish her role in it. Cathy, having found a match for the fictitious description of the alleged attacker, assumes the role of gang leader by the end of the play, while Leah leaves, unable to cope with Phil's response to Adam's reappearance. Being part of the gang and belonging to it appear to be fluid states as members age, become disillusioned or find other interests.

Kelly explores psychological bullying as well as the physical abuse of Adam, and clear parallels can be drawn with recent real-life cases of bullying that ruined people's lives. Phil is perhaps the most interesting character, as he does not respond to Leah's appeals for assurance and security. His seemingly callous disregard for her feelings amounts to bullying, and his reaction to her leaving at the end of the play is a surprise – it is the only time we hear him address her directly – when it is too late.

John Tate appears to bully mercilessly to keep power. He disappears from the action early but is referenced as having 'lost it' and 'found God' as the play progresses. Kelly reminds us through a few characters that their actions clearly have consequences.

This gang – like all gangs – has its weaker members. Danny, the aspiring dentist, and Brian, for example, are used ruthlessly by Phil to help in the cover-up, but their compliance is only assured through threats of a fate like the one suffered by Adam. Everyone is arguably damaged by what happens, whether it is John Tate taking to his room, Leah moving schools, or Phil being abandoned by Leah.

The play demands that the audience question who is ultimately responsible for the group's callous behaviour towards Adam, exploring the theme of responsibility, both in the initial attack and later, when he reappears as a feral child living under a hedge, apparently untouched by the kind of searches carried out in the real world when a child disappears.



The characters fight to save themselves from blame or, at least, to find some justification for their actions. Jan and Mark consistently refer to ‘laughing’ and being ‘in stitches’ as they recount Adam’s desperately sad attempts to be accepted by the group as he was made to eat leaves, steal vodka, had cigarettes stubbed out on him and ultimately fell to his ‘death’. The shock and guilt are seen in the almost throwaway exchanges such as when Leah says to Phil: ‘you’re not human’.

As a collective, the gang take responsibility as a shared ‘burden’, a device designed to keep all the gang members quiet. The structure of the gang appears to be that they are all in it together but, like Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, some are more in it than others.

When, for example, Phil states, ‘I’m in charge. Everyone is happier. What’s more important: one person or everyone?’, he is starting to make them all feel that they cannot step back from the solution to Adam’s reappearance. By carrying out Phil’s plan, the gang will be responsible for cold-blooded murder, not accidental manslaughter. For Phil, this seems like a small step after he has insisted that Brian positively identify the completely innocent postman whose DNA was found on Adam’s jumper.

The core themes of self and group identity, bullying, cruelty and responsibility should allow all young people to develop opinions about the consequences faced by the characters in this play – and, interestingly, why there is no mention of mobile phones or other devices mentioned in the play, almost as if the gang will form its own network.



## Resources for *DNA*

There are a wealth of resources available on the Pearson Edexcel website and these are being added to and updated regularly. These resources, including the [Sample Assessment Materials](#), and [specimen paper and mark scheme](#), are free to download.

There is a helpful and informative collection of resource information including glossary, production history and contextual information in the prescribed edition to the text.

### Online resources

A resource from the NT production of the play is attached to the end of this guide.

[Production images](#) from the first production at the National theatre, from the portfolio of designer Simon Daw.

Brief review of the first productions as part of the connections festival: The Guardian [review one](#) and The Guardian [review two](#).

[A review of Hull Truck's production of the play](#), on tour, at the Unicorn Theatre

[Interview with Dennis Kelly](#).

[Resource pack](#) from the Birmingham Repertory theatre production

[The NYT resource pack](#) from the 2016 production

[Contextual article](#).

The National Youth Theatre of Great Britain Teacher's Pack is at the end of this document as this is not available online.

YouTube is a useful resource and teachers, and students may find theatrical versions of the play useful, some full length, while others are extracts. These can be used to suggest ideas for staging and the ways in which the characters can be portrayed. Past production/rehearsal photos can also be found online, and these may offer ideas for performers, directors and designers

### Soundtracks that may be useful when exploring *DNA*:

- music from any current artist to punctuate/underscore or simply to mark a change of time/location
- various location sound effects – street/field/wood – to support the isolation of the characters but to indicate the presence of a world around them – available online.



## Practical activities to help prepare for Component 3

The following suggested exercises may help students practically explore some of the key characters, themes and ideas that are central to *DNA*, and to have some practical experience of bringing the text to life.

Students must respond to the text as performers, directors and designers, so practical experience of all of these roles will be useful. However, the questions are grouped into two areas:

- activities for performers and for directors of performers
- activities for designers and for directors of production elements.

### 1. Performers and Directors of Performers: Questions (a)(i), (a)(ii) and (b)(ii)

There are a number of performance elements which will come up across these three questions:

- vocal skills/voice
- physical skills/movement
- non-verbal communication
- stage space and stage directions.

Best practice would therefore be to ensure that all students have an understanding of each performance element and how it could be used to enhance the play in performance, as well as a grasp of how to use these elements as a performer and as a director.

Off-text improvisation is a useful explorative technique to consider the 'before and after' life of the play. Students might explore moments from the play that the audience does not explicitly see.

For example:

- the bullying of Adam
- the incident where he falls off the grille
- Cathy and Brian planting the postman's DNA
- Cathy finding Adam in the woods.

Hot-seating is a valuable and exciting method to develop characterisation and to explore motive/ objective. This could be combined with off-text improvisation. For example, an interesting exercise might be to create a news report for which some of the characters are interviewed for the local media after reporters are alerted to events surrounding Adam's disappearance. Each character will have a different viewpoint, but there will be an element



of control by Phil in what is said. It would also be interesting to have John Tate and Leah interviewed, perhaps years after the events.

This kind of activity might be particularly useful as students are first exploring the play.

It would also help students to consider the journey of the character in the context of the complete text. This would work well to develop understanding of improvisation work early on in the process but would also be an excellent practical revision technique for students.

Exploring voice and vocal skills such as volume, pitch, tone, pace, pause, emphasis, accent and dialect can also help performers and directors of performers to consider character choices. How might vocal choices help the audience understand where characters come from? How might they show an understanding of the character at that moment within the play?

Still image and mime are often highly effective in exploring the use of physical skills and non-verbal communication and the use of space. Students could be given the opportunity to look at relationships and emotions within a given moment from the text by creating either a short sequence of mime or a series of still images. Using facial expression, movement, gesture, posture and their proxemics (or position within the performance space) will enhance their understanding of how these characters might be feeling at this moment, or what they might want to achieve.

Following practical activities, evaluating the ways in which performance skills have been used and asking students to offer reasons for their performance choices verbally after sharing work, will also help students become more confident with the relevant vocabulary.

Staging and rehearsing a key scene with a particular focus is also a helpful activity for students. This focus might be the kind of statement to be found in question (b)(ii) for example, '**Phil says, 'I'm in charge'**'. Assigning the role of director to one student within each the group and asking the director to verbally justify or give reasons for the choices made when staging the scene, similarly, will help all students to grasp the role of the director and to feel more confident about responding on paper to question (b)(ii).

Once students are more confident in working as a director, or with a student director, further explorative activities might be useful. For example, exploring the use of proxemics and stage space with the director. The director assigns roles and gives each character a double who feeds lines to the performer, allowing the performers to move around the space without needing to hold a script. The director gives clear suggestions for the use of space and movement to the performers. This could also be applied to vocal and/ or physical skills.

## 2. Designers and Directors of Production Elements: Questions (b)(i) and (c)

There are six production/design elements which will come up across these two questions:

- staging
- set
- props and stage furniture
- costume
- lighting
- sound.

Three of these will be possible options on each question with all six appearing on the paper each year. Best practice would therefore be to ensure that all students have an understanding of each production/ design element and how it could be used to enhance the play in performance. A grasp of how the differences in approaching these elements as a director and as a designer will also be valuable.

It might be useful to set up a **production meeting** and pitch for your students. In this model, for example, a small group of five could consist of a director, set, costume, sound and lighting designers. The director then asks important questions to each member of the production team in order to develop a creative concept for a production of the play and then sells a potential 'theatrical' pitch to the teacher (producer or 'dragon' in order to secure funding).

The teacher should support students by ensuring that the students all have a good understanding of the text and of appropriate performance styles for this text. Each member of each production team must justify their ideas by referring to key moments from the play. This is a useful discussion exercise that also lends itself to research, images and presentations. It would also make an excellent 'active' revision session in time for the written examination.

Exploring different music and sound effects for key moments is another effective way of considering how sound design can play an important role in the development of a key idea of theme. There are a number of sound cues within the text already and these could be created live or using recorded sound. Similarly, there are opportunities for music and sound to be used to create atmosphere and/ or location, for example, in the rainforest, or when Sophie's memory is disappearing.

It is worth considering how **lighting** might be used to create atmosphere and the different locations within the play. There are a number of lighting changes and blackouts within the play text and these could be created using colour, intensity and specific lighting effects such as gobos. Different kinds of lamp could also be used to create shadows and suspense, for example in the final section of the play when Alex is trying to make his choice.

If access to lighting is limited, students might want to consider experimenting with torches, as well as researching previous productions and lighting designs to see how other theatre





makers have used lighting to create impact. There are also computer programmes available that will help to create a virtual set and lighting grid for a production of the play.

Creating a model box or stage plan of a potential set design is a useful exercise and can be as simple or as elaborate as required. It is often useful for students to see how each scene or episode will be played in a potential space, and to choose a specific stage. By creating this visually they will be able to refer more easily to their ideas when writing about set, stage furniture or staging in particular. *DNA* was originally staged with a deliberately minimalistic set, but students may choose to create a more specific set, using levels, and/or simple stage furniture such as blocks or rostra, projection of images and/or scene titles to make the different locations and the differences between the time periods clearer for the audience.

Another useful exercise that helps to build the world of the play and develop ideas for performance is designing potential costumes and props. Research is key and will help students who are initially daunted about the thought of 'designing'. They don't have to be great artists to create great designs. Students could be asked to link their intentions with the initial production, as they will need to do in question (b)(i) either because they are adopting a similar approach or because they are developing different ideas. The time in which the play is set is not specified but was generally contemporary to 2002 in the first production. Students may choose to make the time period more specific; costume designers will also need to think about how the physical style of the play will be supported through the style of the costume for each character.

While the majority of these activities will result in informal sharing within the class, using the set text as the basis for more formal performance work is also worth considering. *DNA* is a prohibited text for Component 2. However, students might complete a mock performance from text in year 10 using extracts from their prescribed text. This will not only support performance and design skills; it will also help students to become confident with staging extracts from the play for an audience.



## The National Youth Theatre of Great Britain Teacher's Pack: DNA

Dennis Kelly's

# DNA

The National Youth Theatre of Great Britain Teacher's Pack

Exclusive resources, interviews & classroom activities for Key Stages 3–5

Photography by Helen Maybanks, Helen Murray, Ed Clark & Mark Cocksedge

Education Pack to support Key Stage 3, 4 & 5 students and teachers.

This pack was developed with teachers and theatre professionals to support schools' visits to the production. The pack is designed for Drama and English students who are studying the play, and includes production interviews, textual extracts, film extracts and classroom activities to inspire creative and analytical responses tied to the curriculum.



## DNA

### Ambassadors Theatre

9 November – 25 November

Director – Sean Hollands

Amongst the darkness of an unnamed wood, a lawless gang are trying to bury a dark secret. The group need someone to take charge, but who can they trust? Who do they follow? While lies spiral and tension mounts, everyday adolescence twists and turns into an anarchic game of survival. This West End premiere will see the National Youth Theatre REP Company bring to life Dennis Kelly's moral tug of war between actions and their consequences.

Director – Sean Hollands

Designer – Ivan Alexander Todorov

Composer – Felix Mackenzie-Barrow

Fight Director – Bethan Clark

Lighting Designer & Operator –

Gareth Weaver

Sound Designer & Operator –

Daffyd Gough

Deputy Head of Costume –

Ugne Dainiute

Company Stage Manager –

Linsey Hall

Stage Manager – TC Mangan

Deputy Stage Manager – Lizzie Rodjpe

Assistant Stage Manager –

Evie Graham-Brown

Technical Manager – Jackson Ingle

## Ambassadors Theatre

### Backstage Members

Costume – India Ferguson

Costume – Marnie O'Ceallaigh

Costume – Saskia Daw

Costume – Anna Kennedy

Costume – Laura Fontana

Costume – Alice Wooding

Costume – William Orton

Deputy Stage Manager –

Thom Mangan

Assistant Stage Manager –

Lizzie Rodjpe

Assistant Stage Manager –

Abigail Palmer

Assistant Stage Manager –

Tash Orchant

Assistant Stage Manager –

Henrietta Hammant

Assistant Stage Manager –

Charlie Zinzen

Costume Assistant –

Anna Francesca Kennedy

Lighting and Sound Assistant –

Danny Vavrecka

Lighting and Sound Assistant –

Abigail Waller

Lighting and Sound Assistant –

Violet Mermelstein

Scenic Art Assistant – Aurélie Webb

Scenic Art Assistant – Joe Peers

Scenic Art Assistant – Jessica Case

Scenic Art Assistant –

Marie-Claire de Voil

## Sean Hollands

### 2016 Bryan Forbes NYT REP

#### Assistant Director Bursary Recipient

This bursary was established in 2013 following the death of our late great former President Bryan Forbes CBE. The bursary, now in its third year, offers an emerging director from the National Youth Theatre company a £10,000 bursary, a year of mentoring by a leading director and the chance to assistant direct and direct productions in the West End with our REP Company. We're thrilled that this year's mentor is Dominic Cooke and that Sean will be directing DNA and assistant directing Romeo and Juliet and Pigeon English.

We're delighted to confirm that following a generous donation from Emma Forbes we will continue to offer this unique opportunity for two more years.

If you'd like to make a donation in memory of Bryan or find out more go to:  
[www.nyt.org.uk/bryanforbesbursary](http://www.nyt.org.uk/bryanforbesbursary)



Cast



Arianna Beadie  
Jan



Seraphina Beh  
Mandy



Chinenye Ezeudu  
Danny



Daisy Fairclough  
Cathy



Natasha Heliotis  
Jo Tate



Shiv Jalota  
Adam



Shalisha James-Davis  
Julie



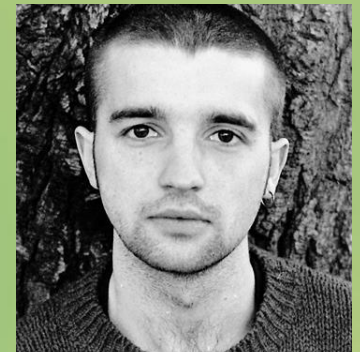
Michael Kinsey  
Lou



Charlotte Law  
Becky



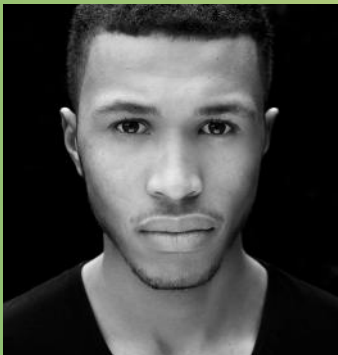
Joshua Lyster-Downer  
Mark



James Mace  
Josh



Felix Mackenzie-Barrow  
Matt



Kwami Odoom  
Jack



Joe Pierson  
Phil



Nathaniel Wade  
Richard



Catrin Walker-Booth  
Leah

## We Are Proud of Our Young

A nation strives and struggles to find a new identity and place in the world. Hundreds of young people unite to celebrate sixty years of the world's first youth theatre and one of our members suffers racial hatred on our streets in 2016. There is work to be done.

But the solution is clear: a vital force in youth arts opportunity, the NYT at 60 has nurtured and supported thousands of young talented voices encouraging empathy, cohesion and communication in all its participants. These three important qualities were all too lacking in our supposed role models as they took to the political stage earlier this year. It's a living travesty that is in danger of alienating a generation and reversing the valuable work all arts communities stand by. Against all odds of too little government funding, and an increasingly expensive education system, the National Youth Theatre is strong and proud of its identity in celebrating the mis-fit and banning the bland. Whilst offering many their first job in our growing creative economy, we also believe in a second chance for those less fortunate in their first.

We reach out to those with no life-line, no confidence, and no hope. We also reach out to those who believe they are sitting comfortably in a world of opportunity but encourage them to go beyond their perceived comfort zone. The magnetic result is a creative powerhouse which celebrates the nation's diversity and ever evolving cultural heritage with some of the most relevant work on offer for young people today. We create a company of young voices that mixes the demographic of privilege and poverty, with the character of vulnerability and verve, and in doing so we all learn the best lessons from the best of each other.

At least two of our West End Season productions each year are chosen from the School curriculum to inspire those studying the plays in a way no other company of actors could. Our NYT REP season captures students' imagination, with a cast trained to professional standard but young enough to keep their attention, and award-winning playwrights and directors to produce great theatre in the heart of the West End.

I am immensely proud to be championing this life changing charity in its sixtieth year, which has encouraged those on the fringes of society to speak up and play their part to theatrical applause. We should and must be proud of our young, and be equally proud of their futures. But surely the growing question for us all now is will they still be proud of us? Investing in our company and our shared values is a good way to start.

Paul Roseby  
Artistic Director and Chief Executive



## Introduction

The National Youth Theatre of Great Britain is a world-leading youth arts organisation. We were established in 1956 as the first youth theatre in the world and have performed critically acclaimed productions over the past 60 years.

Our approach is unique because we believe that the best place for young performers to learn is in front of an audience. Our ensemble ethos means young people working with us learn as much about themselves as they do about acting and how to relate to an audience. Whilst some go on to be great actors, many others go on to be great lawyers, journalists, doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs and CEOs. What they all have in common is that they stand out from the crowd.

We showcase young talent on West End stages, in stadiums worldwide and at iconic sites both at home and abroad. We commission brave and relevant new writing and reinterpret classic stories of our time.

The National Youth Theatre owe a great deal to fantastic teachers around the country. Every year teachers bring groups to see our productions or encourage their pupils to be a part of the organisation by championing our work and sharing our ambitions to deliver life-changing opportunities to young people.

Thank you.

As someone who went to university so couldn't afford Drama School fees, it was invaluable.

Temi Wilkey, 2014 REP Company



## The National Youth Theatre REP Company

The NYT REP Company launched in 2012 in response to the rise in tuition fees to offer an affordable alternative to expensive formal training.

Inspired by the traditional repertory theatre model, the NYT REP Company course offers free, practical, industry-based talent development in drama and performance over nine months to 16 NYT members. The course culminates in three months of performances in the West End.

Each REP member plays three roles in three different productions over a run of 43 performances at the Ambassadors Theatre in the heart of London's West End. Last year over 200 agents and casting directors attended, opening up industry opportunities to the cast. All the company members were signed by leading talent agents and the majority continue to work professionally in theatre, film and TV.

Every REP company member gains an NYT 'buddy' from the previous year's REP company, as well as an industry-based mentor to support their progress and work throughout the programme. This makes the course entirely unique and offers true foundations in the industry.

As good a way into the business  
of acting as any drama school  
**Ian McKellen**







## Plot Summary

### One

Dennis Kelly opens the play in a street. The tense dialogue between Jan and Mark immediately informs us of a dramatic and deadly situation. A death is revealed but the details around the incident remain a mystery.

Kelly quickly changes the setting to a field where we are introduced to Phil and Leah. Phil eats an ice cream throughout the whole scene and says nothing. Leah speaks of the 'brutal terror' that everyone is living in. When Jan and Mark arrive at the end of the scene Mark announces. 'We need to talk to you'. Leah's response 'Oh, shit' heightens the sense that something very serious is wrong.

The third scene is substantially longer and involves the whole cast except Adam. The whole scene is structured around what has happened to him. John Tate exerts his authority on the other teenagers, impressing on them the need for silence. After Richard arrives with the 'grinning' Cathy and the tearful Brian, John Tate forces the friends to acknowledge his leadership. We finally hear what has happened to Adam when the arrival of Jan, Mark, Phil and Leah leads to a chilling description from Mark of Adam's apparently fatal fall. Phil speaks for the first time in the play issuing instructions for an elaborate plan to fake DNA evidence to divert suspicion from their own involvement in Adam's death.

The final scene of this first section of the play returns to the field for the second of Leah and Phil's duologues. Leah muses on the difference in behaviour between bonobos and chimps. Phil says nothing, remaining silent apart from eating a packet of crisps throughout the scene. In what seems an effort to test Phil's capacity for empathy Leah attempts to strangle herself.

### Two

As with the first, Kelly opens the second section with Jan and Mark in a street. Like the opening scene it is a tense short scene introducing a complication into the action, 'He's not going'. The audience is left wondering to whom and what Mark's comment refers.

The second scene continues the pattern of structural repetitions. Leah speaks to a silent junk-food eating Phil, she reveals the group have been carrying out Phil's instructions. Again, Jan and Mark appear at the end of the scene. Jan announces 'We need to talk', suspense grows over what has gone wrong.

In the second of Kelly's three ensemble woodland scenes, Lou and Danny bring Leah and a muffin-eating Phil the news that the man who supposedly killed Adam has been found. The group is faced with the dilemma of whether to speak or keep silent. Richard and Cathy enter and reveal they have faked DNA evidence to link a postman to Adam's disappearance. Jan and Mark arrive with Brian who is refusing to identify the postman. In a reprise of the action in the first scene Phil's words suggest a solution. Phil threatens Brian stating that unless he goes to the police he will join Adam at the bottom of the shaft.

Brian agrees to identify the postman. All the teenagers choose or are forced to become complicit in the cover-up.

Again, as with the first section the second ends with a scene between Leah and Phil set in a field. Leah has an epiphany that the group is caught in a repeated pattern of behaviour. Phil's only word in the scene 'No', is to deny Leah's belief that 'If you can change one thing you can change the world'.

### Three

Jan and Mark begin section three in a street. Kelly introduces a further complication into the plot. Mark reveals to a shocked and bemused Jan that 'Cathy found him in the woods'.

Arriving in the field with a suitcase Leah tells Phil she is 'running away'. She reveals that Brian is on medication, that John Tate has not been seen, and that the postman is spending his life in prison. Jan and Mark arrive and announce 'You really should come with us', they disturb Phil's eating of his carefully made jam waffle. Leah goes with them to the wood.

The third of the three ensemble woodland scenes in the darkest scene in the play, in which Kelly shows us how far some members of the group will go to protect themselves. When Phil greets the strange boy Adam, who appears homeless, the audience realises the group has been mistaken in believing him dead. Here we see the teenagers at their most helpless, deeply incriminated by their actions and complicit in the plot to frame the postman.

Phil responds to the groups' cries of 'What are we gonna do?', by showing a 'game' to Brian and Cathy where a plastic bag is placed over Brian's head. The audience realizes that Adam is teaching them how to suffocate Adam. Phil is deaf to Leah's pleas as Cathy and Brian exit with Adam.

Back in the field in the immediate aftermath Phil tries to comfort the quietly crying Leah with a Starburst, and by putting his arm around her. In a reversal of earlier scenes Leah says nothing, eventually spitting out her Starburst and storming off. Phil is left alone calling after her.

### Four

The final section starts with a street scene between Jan and Mark. Mark reveals 'She's gone' referring to Leah. Jan's final question, 'Does Phil know?' sets up the final scene in the play.

In the concluding field scene, Phil remains silent. For the first time he is not eating. A sign he has become withdrawn and unhappy. Phil is now accompanied by Richard rather than Leah. He brings news of the other teenagers' lives, and tries to cajole Phil into coming back to the group.

The play ends leaving the audience with an uncertain and ambivalent feeling at the end.

## Directors notes by Sean Hollands

### Production Design

In designing this play we were considering the use of the ensemble and how we could best pose the questions of the play. Cast wise I had decided to create an ensemble that isn't typically in DNA, that were the symbolic representation of the community that follows the will of the leader. We know Phil manipulates the police, parents and everyone else at the school, I thought it important to show the power of the leader as something present in the space. In regards to the questions of the play, DNA is a proposal of the question: are the needs of the many more important than the needs of the few? I believe DNA presents the morality in dealing with these questions but ultimately it's the audience who decides whether the character's actions are right or wrong.

Bertolt Brecht was a large influence for me in this production, in our use of lights, signs and microphones. I wanted the themes of morality and leadership to be clear so we used tools to symbolize them and raise questions in these particular themes.

In rehearsing the play we began to play with torches and portable flood lights, I liked the idea that the ensemble had a way of controlling space under the orders over whoever the leader is. It also presented us with the ability to play with shadows and silhouettes. Much of the actions of the group happens in secret to the rest of the community, so it made sense for the figures to appear in the dark.

The use of the microphones gave us the ability to present the traditionally Mark and Jan duologues in a different way, by having them delivered by the ensemble characters. By having the dialogue performed into microphones it enabled us to play with the text in an almost grotesque

form. The actors were instructed to get close to the microphone in order to pick up their breath and vocal mannerisms. It allowed us to present the ensemble as ever present beings, rather than actual people in the space, which gave them the ability to manipulate the physical space and be used as devices to achieve the aims of Phil.

Both the microphones and the lights allowed us to focus, and pinpoint moments. Often when there is vital information being given, Phil needs to tune in to find out what is happening, in these moments the torches highlight the action and close down the space. Using practical lights in this way meant we had much more flexibility to light what we wanted, be it a facial expression or a choreographed sequence. The microphones allowed characters like Danny and Lou to deliver lines that seemed completely detached from a regular sense of morality. Such as when Danny is more concerned about getting references for dental college, than the fact that they may have ruined a poor man's life. I felt it important to amplify those moments of seeming disconnection from morality and highlight them to the audience, so that the audience recognises their absurdity in the situation.

### Themes in DNA

DNA is a play of arguably many themes: power, trust, chimps. However in directing this production I chose to focus on leadership. We live in a strange time of leaders and power. In doing this production I have discovered the power of the individual's actions. At one point in the play Leah asks Phil "If you change one thing you can change the world, do you believe that?" to which Phil responds, "No". I found it baffling that the one character who is changing everything, thinks he isn't doing anything. Then you realise that Phil lives in a bubble. The bubble of him and Leah, that's his world, and that doesn't change, not until Leah takes action. It's a simple action, but it's enough to show that one person can make a difference, if they decide to act. You can't be the leader if no one decides to follow you.

Phil is the leader, he becomes the leader by proposing manipulative and gradually more violent means, but he carries none of the tasks out himself. Know any other leaders like that? The members of the group wrestle with their morality but ultimately decide to follow orders. Dennis Kelly doesn't propose this is wrong. He proposes the question, what's more important, the needs of the many or the few? Every single person in the play has the opportunity to not follow orders, to break away or tell someone what happened, but they don't. Why? I think each character has their own reason, be it self-preservation, guilt or fear. However the group operates as a pack under clear instruction, and once a pack starts down a path, it's very difficult to be the one person that wants to turn back. Especially if you're going up against someone who will threaten you with death and has no issue in manipulating the police and the parents of a dead child.

At this point I also don't want you to think Phil is evil. I think it's easy to think he is the villain and be done with it. However if you could help a group of people, would you? You can't change the fact that someone is dead, so why ruin the lives of everyone else? If you wanted to protect your best friend by not involving them, would you? Phil's orders aren't humane to say the least, but the objective is to keep 10 people from going to prison, and in that regard he is a complete success.

DNA is a question. What would you do? If you had the option to protect yourself, would you take it? At what point does your morality make you turn the other way? It's a question we all face today and will continue to face when our leaders make judgements, laws and decisions. DNA proposes all these questions to which there is no 'right' answer, that's up to you.



## DNA: Classroom Exercises.

### Note from Director, Sean Hollands.

'I read an interview from Dennis Kelly about DNA, and he spoke about the question: do the needs of the many, outweigh the needs of the few? It's an age old question that the play doesn't give a definitive answer to, which is one of the great things about it. So in my interpretation of this production I wanted to look at tackling Kelly's question, with my own question. Who do we choose to follow as our leaders, and why? Who gets to decide, who is the 'many' and who is the 'few'? Going into rehearsal, this is the question I will look to bring to the forefront of the production.'

### Classroom/Rehearsal Exercises:

Leah's monologues can be daunting. Especially when the actor you are opposite looks like they aren't doing very much. So a couple of exercises might help.

### Exercise 1: Leah's monologues.

Choose questions from Leah's monologues and let the person playing Phil, actually answer them. Let the improvisation continue. Let the actor playing Leah, experience what they are trying so desperately trying to achieve. It will help the actor get a sense of what they are searching for, because they will get so little of it in the play, and it will come too little, too late.

There is little information about the world these characters inhabit. We never see any adults, nor do we see any particular buildings. We aren't given a specific town or part of the country. This really allows the people in this production to create the world for themselves.

### Exercise 2: Hot-seating.

Ask the company to interview one another. Write down some questions, grab something to record with and do an actual interview about growing up as a teenager. What is important? What stresses are you dealing with? What's the best show on TV right now? Where do you fit in the school?

This is a tight group of friends. Build these characters and this world together, because it is the most important thing to all of them, and they need to know each other.

### Exercise 3: Improvisation.

A couple of improvisations to try out:

What happens to Adam at school? What is an average day like for him, before the incident? For Adam he needs to have a gut feeling, something instinctual that tells him that living in the woods, is better than going back to school and seeing his family.

Also try putting on some music, and improvising Adam's memorial. Choose a space to set a shrine, maybe put some props down that the group feel represent Adam. Try doing it in silence just with some music. While it is of course a sad occasion, where people will be feeling guilty, there needs to be an incredible sense of community. The group should feel closer than ever at this point in the play, and will help to remind the actors why Adam, simply can't come back.

## Scene Study

[Download the script exert here](#)

[Download a film of the scene here](#)



## Further Resources

Characters: DNA by Dennis Kelly | English Literature – Making a Scene, BBC Teach

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuYIV8JJOSA>

Themes: DNA by Dennis Kelly | English Literature – Making a Scene, BBC Teach

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTcahwr-hfo>

Dennis Kelly: Rioters thought there were no rules - but my characters know right from wrong, Telegraph article

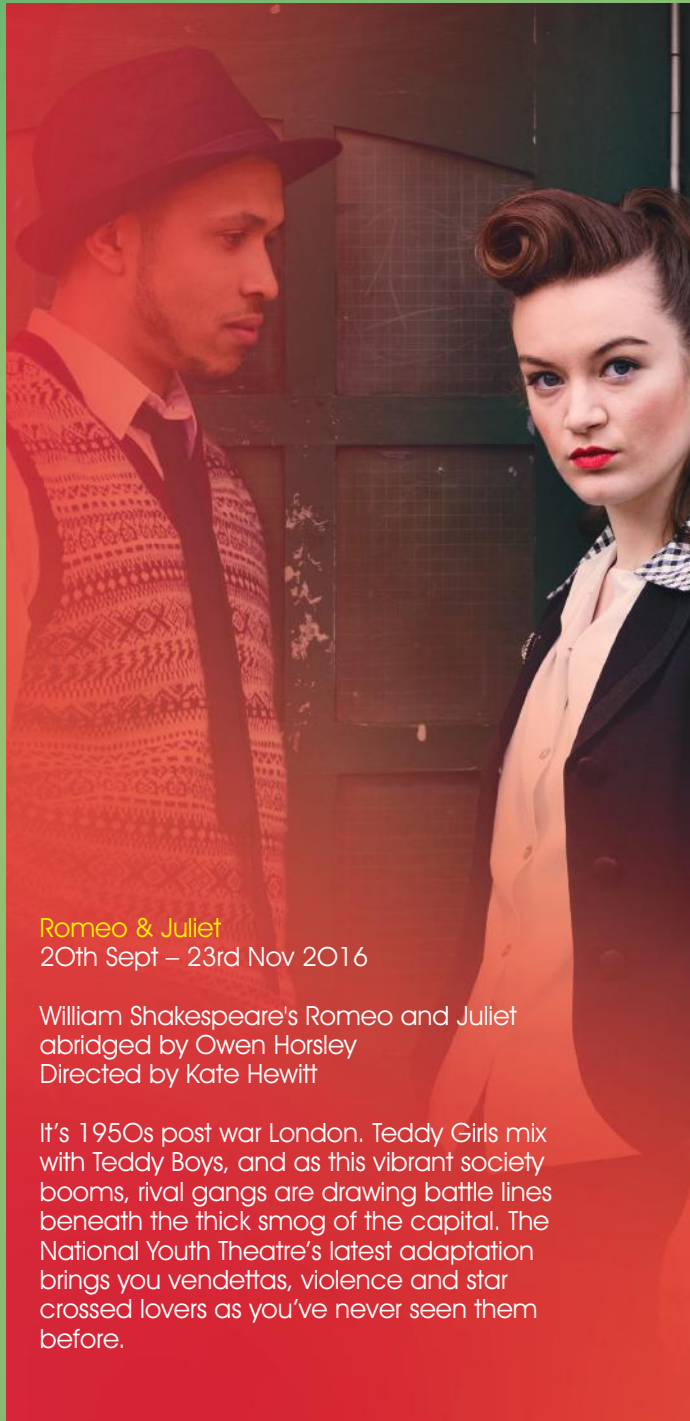
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/9052744/Dennis-Kelly-Rioters-thought-there-were-no-rules-but-my-characters-know-right-from-wrong.html>



Experience the thrill of  
the entire West End Season

Book Now

The Ambassadors Theatre  
[www.theambassadorstheatre.co.uk](http://www.theambassadorstheatre.co.uk)  
020 7395 5405



**Romeo & Juliet**  
20th Sept – 23rd Nov 2016

William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet  
abridged by Owen Horsley  
Directed by Kate Hewitt

It's 1950s post war London. Teddy Girls mix with Teddy Boys, and as this vibrant society booms, rival gangs are drawing battle lines beneath the thick smog of the capital. The National Youth Theatre's latest adaptation brings you vendettas, violence and star crossed lovers as you've never seen them before.



**Stephan Kelman's Pigeon English**  
Adapted by Gbolahan Obisesan  
26th Sept – 22nd Nov 2016

Set against a backdrop of beatboxing, graffiti and skate parks, Stephen Kelman's 2011 Man Booker prize shortlisted novel has been electrifyingly adapted for the stage for its West End premiere by award-winning playwright Gbolahan Obisesan. Pigeon English tells the story of inner city life and having to grow up fast on the streets.

### Audition to join the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain

Auditions and interviews are now open to join the National Youth Theatre Company. We want to discover exceptional performers and technicians from across the UK and will be visiting over 30 theatre and arts venues in Spring 2017.

Visit [www.nyt.org.uk/audition](http://www.nyt.org.uk/audition) to find out more

### CPD Events for teachers

We host regular and free CPD event for teachers and educators who would like to know more about how we approach theatre making with young people. Gain an insight into how to develop a large-scale production and best practice for nurturing young talent.

Join our Schools Mailing List to hear about our next event

For more information please contact [frankie.haynes@nyt.org.uk](mailto:frankie.haynes@nyt.org.uk)

### Get involved now

#### 6 Day Masterclass Courses

During academic holidays we run six day masterclasses for young people aged 15-25 across the UK. Led by industry professionals these courses provide a platform for participants to develop their talent, performance skills and confidence. Find out more: [www.nyt.org.uk/masterclass](http://www.nyt.org.uk/masterclass)

#### Club Membership

Competition is always tough to successfully audition for the National Youth Theatre Company.

Club Membership offers exclusive opportunities, discounts and advice to those who haven't auditioned yet, or didn't quite make it last time, but want to stay involved.

Club Membership is open to anyone auditioning aged 12-25.

Find out more: <http://www.nyt.org.uk/membership/club-membership>

The National Youth Theatre offers  
a stellar beginning for young actors  
**BBC Radio 4**

