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 Cocksdale

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 Rodipe
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 Rodipe
Assistant Stage Manager – Abigail Palmer
Assistant Stage Manager – Tash Orchard
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 Mermeinstein
Scenic Art Assistant – Aurélie Webb
Scenic Art Assistant – Joe Peers
Scenic Art Assistant – Jessica Case
Scenic Art Assistant – Marie-Claire de Voill

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 assist 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
Cast

Arianna Beadie
Jan

Seraphina Beh
Mandy

Chinenye Ezeudu
Danny

Daisy Fairclough
Cathy

Natasha Helalis
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 Pesson
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.

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

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.
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
Adam
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
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
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 wreak. Phil turns to Cathy to carry out the murder of Adam. By the end of play Cathy is ‘running things’.

Danny
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 wines Danny is ultimately a passive member of the group who will do as he is told by the leader.

Jan and Mark
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 of.

John Tate
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 suggests 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
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.

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 breathtaking 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
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 fulfill 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.
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 expresses 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 him. John Tate rushes to the park and says nothing. Leah quickly changes the setting to a 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 taken 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 realises 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.
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 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. 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 packs 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=UuYIV8JJOGA

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
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**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 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

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

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