

Character Performance — Danny and Lou

Danny and Lou aren't starring roles, but you might regret it on exam day if you haven't revised them...

Danny is a self-interested character

- 1) Danny seems out of place amongst the rest of the group. The other characters don't appear to care about school or the future, but Danny wants to become a dentist. In fact, he rarely speaks about anything else.
- 2) He's so determined to become a dentist that he comes across as selfish. For example, his main objection to Adam's 'death' is that it might affect his future career ("Dentists don't get mixed up in things").

Guilt and Responsibility

Minor characters like Danny and Lou aren't as responsible for Adam's death as Phil and Cathy, but they're not guilt-free. It's up to the actors playing them and the director to determine how much of the blame they should receive and how to convey their accountability using performance skills.

- 3) To express Danny's concern, an actor might fidget nervously and use a worried facial expression when the group discuss the cover-up. He could also speak in a hesitant or trembling voice, as though he's finding it difficult to contain his anxiety.
- 4) In Act Two ("A Wood"), Danny is clearly shocked when Phil threatens Brian. Here, an actor may stare open-mouthed at Phil then say "Is he serious?" in a disbelieving tone of voice.
- 5) Danny doesn't appear on stage after Act Two, which implies that he's trying to distance himself from the group. An actor might hint at his desire to leave in earlier scenes by standing at the edge of the group and glancing around the stage often.

Effect on the Audience

Danny doesn't contribute much to the main plot — it seems likely that he's included in the play to provide humour, particularly when the audience finds out in Act Four ("A Field") that he actually "hates" dentistry.

Lou is nothing more than a follower

- 1) Lou is an impressionable character who seems to be drawn to whoever is in charge. She obeys John Tate and Phil throughout the play, and Richard reveals that she has become Cathy's "best friend" at the end.
- 2) She readily takes part in the cover-up, although she comes across as more pessimistic than the rest of the group. For example, she repeats that they're all "screwed" whenever the cover-up encounters difficulties.



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- 3) An actor might use nervous body language around the other characters to show that Lou is insecure about her position in the group. She may also stand in close proximity to powerful characters (e.g. Phil), as if she's trying to gain their approval.
- 4) Lou doesn't speak much, but an actor might deliver her lines in an anxious tone and add emphasis to the word "screwed" whenever she says it. This would make Lou seem worried.
- 5) Unlike Danny, Lou remains part of the group until the end of the play. The stage directions state that she's "unsure" about leaving Adam with Phil in Act Three ("A Wood"), but she leaves after Phil reassures her. An actor could exit the stage quickly and without looking back to suggest that Lou suspects what will happen to Adam and doesn't want to be involved.



GCSE Drama — it's not quite as painful as pulling teeth...

Kelly doesn't throw minor characters like Danny and Lou into the play at random — everyone is included for a reason. You'll find them easier to write about if you can get your head around why they're on stage.

Practice Questions

After all that, you should know these characters as if they're your best friends. (Actually, forget that. You really don't want to be friends with this lot.) Have a go at these practice questions to check how much you've learnt.

Quick Questions

- 1) Why doesn't Leah initially object to the plan to cover up Adam's 'death'?
- 2) Give three moments in the play where Phil shows his authoritative nature.
- 3) What is Cathy's position in the group at the end of the play?
- 4) Give two ways that an actor might use physical skills to convey Adam's fear in Act Three.
- 5) Find one example from the play which shows that John Tate is a weak leader.
- 6) In Act Two, what makes Brian change his mind and agree to go to the police station?
- 7) Briefly describe Richard's status in the group.
- 8) Outline one way in which Jan and Mark act as a chorus in the play.
- 9) Give two ways that an actor might use vocal skills to portray Danny as nervous in Act One.
- 10) Outline two character traits that Lou shows in the play.

In-depth Questions

- 1) Explain how an actor playing Leah could use physical and vocal skills to demonstrate Leah's lack of authority when she is with the group.
- 2) In the final scene of Act One, Phil ignores Leah. How might an actor use physical skills to show Phil's character in this scene?
- 3) Explain how an actor might use performance skills throughout the play to convey Cathy's violent nature to the audience.
- 4) What vocal and physical skills might an actor use to portray Adam as confused in Act Three?
- 5) How might an actor convey Brian's mental instability in Act Three?
- 6) Using a combination of physical and vocal skills, how might the actors playing Jan and Mark interact with each other in Act One ("A Wood")?

Practice Questions

Time to check that you've got your head around this performance malarkey by having a go at these practice questions. For each one, come up with a brief plan of what you want to cover and then get writing — you should aim for at least three paragraphs per question. On your marks... get set... write.

Exam-style Questions

Read Act One ("A Wood") from Cathy's entrance to where John Tate says "**That just leaves you, Brian**", then answer Question 1 below.

- 1) Discuss how a performer playing Cathy could communicate key aspects of her character to the audience in this extract. You should consider Cathy's motivations and how the actor could use vocal and physical skills.

Read Act Two ("A Wood") from the point where Richard and Cathy enter to the point where Jan, Mark and Brian enter, then answer Question 2 below.

- 2) As a performer playing the role of Leah, discuss how you would use performance skills to portray her character in this extract. You should explain why your ideas are suitable for this extract and for the rest of the play.

Read Act Three ("A Wood") from where Leah says "**Phil, what are you doing?**" to the end of the scene, then answer Question 3 below.

- 3) Imagine you are directing a production of *DNA*. Explain how a performer playing the role of Phil might demonstrate his manipulative personality in this extract and in the play as whole. Refer to vocal skills, physical skills and interactions with other characters.

Read Act Four ("A Field"), then answer Question 4 below.

- 4) Imagine you're a director creating a production of *DNA*. Discuss how the performer playing Richard might convey his desire to keep the group together, in the extract and the play as a whole. You should consider the performer's use of physical skills, vocal skills and stage space.

Stage Types and Stage Design

A suitable stage type and a well-designed performance space can convey specific ideas to your audience.

'DNA' can be staged in different ways

- 1) When choosing a **stage type**, it's important for a director of DNA to consider the **style** of the production.
- 2) Dennis Kelly intended DNA to be **open to interpretation** (see p.2), so it wasn't written with a particular theatre style in mind. This means that it's up to the **director** to choose a style and a suitable stage type.

- A **naturalistic** production of the play might distance the actors from the audience, e.g. by choosing a stage type that's **set back** from the audience. This would help to maintain the **fourth wall** and make the play feel **more realistic**, which might make it easier for the audience to become immersed in the action on stage.
- A **non-naturalistic** production might use a stage type that brings the actors and the audience **closer together**, making it easier for the fourth wall to be **broken**. This might encourage the audience to reflect on the issues raised by the play by reminding them it's **not real life**.

The fourth wall is the imagined barrier that separates the audience from the performers.

See p.18 for more on the difference between naturalistic and non-naturalistic theatre styles.

- 3) The director's choice of **performance space** needs to be suitable for staging scenes in each of the play's **three locations** — for example, it needs to be able to convey the confined nature of "A Wood", as well as the more open and public spaces of "A Street" and "A Field".

Different stage types create different effects

- 1) **Proscenium arch and end-on staging** allow the director and designers to use backdrops and larger pieces of scenery without interrupting the audience's line of sight. This makes it easier for them to create a clear and realistic representation of the play's three locations on the stage.
- 2) **Thrust staging** provides a clear view of the action on stage, because more of the audience are close to the stage and the performers. This might help the audience to develop a deeper emotional connection with the characters at key moments in the play, such as when Leah rejects Phil at the end of Act Three.
- 3) **Theatre in the round** creates an intimate atmosphere, as the audience completely surrounds the stage. A director could use this stage type to make the performance space feel claustrophobic, particularly in scenes which are set in "A Wood". However, this stage type might cause problems with sightlines and blocking, because the performers will always have their backs to at least one section of the audience.

Effect on the Audience

One problem with these stage types is that the audience may be too far away to pick up on some of the actors' performance skills (e.g. facial expressions). This may reduce the emotional impact of the play.

There's a glossary on p.72-73 if you're struggling with any of the terms in this section.

Theatre in the round can help the audience to feel immersed in the action.



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- 4) **Traverse staging** creates a similarly intimate atmosphere, and it brings the audience so close together that they can see each other across the stage. This could link to the idea of **over-surveillance** (see p.6), as it would give the audience a feeling of being watched. However, this stage type limits the amount of scenery and stage furniture that can be used.
- 5) **Promenade theatre** helps the audience feel more involved in the action. The audience may even start to feel like they're part of the cover-up as they follow the actors between different locations. This would require a large performance space — it might even need to take place outdoors.

Stage Types and Stage Design

Staging and performance space are linked

- 1) A smaller performance space would create the impression that the actors are crowded together during the three group scenes. This would add to the claustrophobic atmosphere in the wood.
- 2) In contrast, a larger performance space would allow the actors to spread across the stage more. This would make each actor's actions and reactions easier for the audience to see when there are multiple characters on stage.
- 3) A director should also consider how different areas of the stage might be used effectively. Stages are often split into nine areas.
- 4) A director can use actors' stage positions to give the audience clues about characters' status. The audience is likely to pay more attention to characters who are downstage, so they will seem more important. For example, a director might choose to position Phil downstage to reinforce that he is in charge.

Upstage Right (USR)	Upstage Centre (USC)	Upstage Left (USL)
Stage Right (SR)	Centre Stage (CS)	Stage Left (SL)
Downstage Right (DSR)	Downstage Centre (DSC)	Downstage Left (DSL)

AUDIENCE

These positions are used for other staging types as well as proscenium arch — one part of the stage is picked as 'downstage', and this is used as a reference for the other terms.

Entrances and exits can be used for dramatic effect

- 1) Kelly's stage directions say when entrances and exits occur, but not how or where characters should enter or exit the stage. A director should consider the impact they want each entrance or exit to create.



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- Jan and Mark interrupt Leah's monologues near the start of the first three acts. The actors playing Jan and Mark might rush on stage via a walkway through the audience at these moments. This would draw the audience's attention to them and make their search for Leah and Phil seem urgent.
- In Act Three ("A Wood"), Cathy and Brian move off stage to kill Adam as Leah pleads with them to "stop". Cathy and Brian might exit upstage on the opposite side of the stage to Leah, going down steps into the wings. They would gradually descend out of Leah's (and the audience's) sight, highlighting that Leah can't stop Adam being murdered.

- 2) The use of entrances and exits also depends on the stage type. For example, theatre in the round could allow numerous entrance and exit points on all sides of the stage. Having characters entering and leaving by different routes would hint that they are detached from one another and are not close friends.

The position of your entrances and exits has to work with the stage type you choose.

REVISION TASK

I have a joke on stage space, but I need longer to planet...

Decide what stage type you would use to produce the final "Field" scene in Act Three. Write two paragraphs about how you would stage this section using this stage type. Write about:

- 1) Why your choice of stage type is suitable for staging this section.
- 2) Any disadvantages of using this stage type.
- 3) The mood and atmosphere you want to create.

Tick list:

- ✓ details about one stage type
- ✓ awareness of practical issues
- ✓ effect on the audience

Set Design

It's not enough for your set design to look nice — it has to reflect the setting and the style of the production.

A naturalistic set is meant to look real...

- 1) In a **naturalistic** production of *DNA*, the set design should recreate the play's settings as authentically as possible. This helps the audience **suspend their disbelief** and become **fully immersed** in the action.
- 2) The play could be staged **outside** in a real street, field and wood. There are **practical issues** with doing this, so most productions are staged **indoors**, with a set designed to convey the outdoor settings.
- 3) For example, the set for "*A Street*" could include a **high wall** made of polystyrene that has been painted to look like **red brick** — this would make it look like a generic wall that could be found in any town or city. A designer might choose to cover the wall in **graffiti** and make it look **damaged** — this would convey ideas about **social responsibility** by reminding the audience about anti-social behaviour.
- 3) The actors playing Leah and Phil could sit together on an **artificial grass mat** to create a **realistic impression** of "*A Field*". A set designer might choose to add **extra details** like **plants and bushes** for the scenes set in "*A Field*" to make the set more true to life.
- 4) A realistic representation of "*A Wood*" might be difficult to achieve, but a set designer could use **fake trees** made of **plaster** or **resin**. The trunks might have a **rough texture** to make them more life-like. To make the set design even more realistic, a designer could scatter **real leaves** across the stage floor.

An entirely realistic outdoor setting is hard to recreate indoors, so a designer might use realistic elements rather than trying to design whole settings in a realistic way.

... but it's not the designer's only option

- 1) In a **non-naturalistic** production of *DNA*, the set design **wouldn't** try to recreate real life. **Minimalist** sets and **abstract** sets are two ways of achieving a non-naturalistic style.
- 2) In a **minimalist** production, the set design doesn't include much in the way of scenery, stage furniture or props, so the design features that are included might have more **significance**:
 - A minimalist set design might communicate each setting to the audience using a **single item** associated with the setting — e.g. "*A Street*" might be portrayed using a **lamppost**, while "*A Wood*" might be portrayed using a **fallen tree branch**.
 - These items might be **broken** in some way to make the set design more **symbolic**. For example, the street lamp for the "*Street*" scenes may be **smashed** or **rusty** to symbolise the **breakdown** of modern British society (see p.6-7).

- 3) In an **abstract** production, the set isn't supposed to look realistic. Using an abstract set design for *DNA* would encourage the audience to **think about the themes and issues** of the play:

- The scenery in an **abstract** set might be **unrealistic** in **scale** — using **oversized** scenery would make the group seem **smaller**, which would emphasise their youth as well as their lack of control over the situation.
- In Act Three ("*A Wood*"), a set designer might replace the trees from previous scenes with others which are **gnarled** or **twisted** into unnatural shapes. This would symbolise Adams and Brian's **mental decline** and create an **unsettling atmosphere** for the audience.

This production used a wooden structure to symbolise "*A Wood*":



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Set Design

Levels have lots of different uses

- 1) Kelly's stage directions don't mention stage levels, but a set designer can still use them.
- 2) Raised platforms (called rostra) could be used to emphasise important moments in the play. In Act Three ("A Wood"), Adam might stand on a rostrum in a centre stage position. This would elevate him above the rest of the group and draw the audience's attention to him, increasing the impact of his monologue.
- 3) A designer could use split staging to show the play's different locations on stage at the same time. Each setting could be on a different level, with settings at the back raised higher than those at the front so the audience could see them all. This would allow the action to switch between a street, a field and a wood without scene changes.
- 4) Levels can also be used to reveal more about the dynamics of the group. For example, leaders of the group such as John Tate and Phil could stand on rostra — positioning them at a higher level to other characters would symbolise their high status.

Split Staging

A director could also use split staging to show events that occurred before the start of the play. When Jan and Mark describe bullying Adam in Act One ("A Wood"), an actor playing Adam could act out what they're describing on a higher level to the rest of the group. This would separate Adam from the others and emphasise that it's a flashback.

Technical devices can make it easier to stage 'DNA'...

- 1) The play frequently changes location, so technical devices can be used to speed up scene changes and make the transitions smooth. The setting of "A Street" could be created by painting a row of houses onto a truck, which could be wheeled away to reveal Phil and Leah sitting behind it for a "Field" scene.



© Donald Cooper/photostage

This production projected an image of a wood onto a cyclorama behind the actors.

- 2) Painted flats could be used to create the effect of different materials. This would allow a set designer to create an impression of heavy or expensive materials like brick or stone without having to use the real thing. This is useful for the play's outdoor settings of the street, field and wood, which contain lots of materials that are difficult to use on stage.
- 3) A projector could be used to project still or moving images of a street, field or wood onto a cyclorama in an upstage position. This would create a backdrop without needing to build different pieces of scenery, as well as making it quick and easy to swap between the play's three settings.

... and they can also be used to create special effects

A set designer may also use technical devices for dramatic effect, or to enhance the mood and atmosphere:

- In a non-naturalistic production, when Leah talks about "polluting the natural order" in Act Two, images of real newspaper headlines about pollution and global warming could be projected on a screen behind the actors. This would encourage the audience to focus on the environmental issues Leah refers to.
- The entire play takes place outside, so a wind machine might be used to create the impression that the characters' hair and clothes are moving in a breeze. This would make the play's outdoor settings seem more convincing to the audience.
- In Act Three ("A Wood"), a smoke machine could be used to release a light mist across the stage. This would create an eerie atmosphere, and it would add to the tension when Adam is taken away by Brian by obscuring their exit from the stage from the audience.

Set Design

Props and stage furniture can be used to create meaning

- 1) There aren't many moments in the play that require props or stage furniture, but both can still be used to help establish the setting, create symbolism or help with character development.
- 2) A set designer could use stage furniture to give the audience an impression of the play's settings. For example, "A Street" might contain a number of wheeie bins to signify that it's an urban area.
- 3) Props can be designed to create symbolic effects. For example, Cathy could play with switchblades that increase in size with each act. This would symbolise her increasingly violent nature and create a fearful mood.
- 4) Phil's plastic bag in Act Three ("A Wood") might be red to symbolise its deadly purpose — it's the weapon Cathy uses to murder Adam. Props can also reveal more about a character. For example, a designer could draw the audience's attention to Phil's eating and drinking by using brightly coloured wrapping on his food that is noisy to remove.

Effect on the Audience

Phil's constant snacking is an important source of humour in the play. A designer should make sure the food props are visible to the audience, so it's clear when they're used.



Phil (played by a female actor) holds a fizzy drink.

© Michael Smith/ Auckland Theatre Company

Explain the ideas behind your set design

When you're writing about set design in the exam, it's important to explain the choices that you've made and their effect on the audience. Here's an example of how you might do this:

In Act Two ("A Street"), I would construct the scenery using trucks painted to look like red brick walls to reflect the scene's urban setting. The simple set design wouldn't distract the audience and would ensure that their focus remained on Jan and Mark. Jan and Mark's dialogue focuses on Brian's refusal to go to the police, which could mean that the group's cover-up fails. To symbolise the potential unravelling of their plans, I would use paint to create the illusion that the walls are crumbling and some bricks are missing, making them appear unstable.

Give at least one reason for every part of the design.

This shows a good understanding of how technical devices are used.

This demonstrates awareness of how design choices affect the audience.

REVISION TASK

The scenery's made of jelly — I'm waiting for it to set...

Imagine you're a set designer for a naturalistic production of 'DNA'. Draw an annotated sketch of your set design, including its position on the stage, for a scene set in "A Wood". Include:

- 1) The materials, textures and colours that you'd use.
- 2) Any technical devices that might be needed.
- 3) A brief explanation of why your design choices are appropriate for a naturalistic production of the play.

- Tick list:
- ✓ specific design details
 - ✓ correct use of technical language
 - ✓ understanding of style

Lighting

Lighting designers use (you guessed it...) lighting to support the action on stage — they're a bright bunch.

The use of lighting depends on the style of the production

- 1) Lighting designers can change the direction, colour and intensity of lighting to create a range of effects.
- 2) The lighting for a naturalistic production of *DNA* should make the play's outdoor settings seem realistic. A lighting designer might use lighting effects that mimic natural light like sunlight and moonlight.
- 3) A naturalistic production could also use visible sources of artificial lighting to reflect the modern setting. For example, a working street light might be used to illuminate Jan and Mark in the "Street" scenes.
- 4) Lighting designers have more freedom in non-naturalistic productions, because the onstage lighting doesn't have to create a realistic impression. For example, when Phil explains his plan to the others during Act One ("A Wood"), the light might fade until he is the only character lit by a profile spotlight. This non-naturalistic use of lighting would make him stand out as the group's new leader.

Lighting has a wide range of practical uses

A key concern for a lighting designer is making sure that the audience can see what's happening on stage. However, lighting has other practical uses:

- Lighting can be used to establish the play's settings. For example, a lighting designer might place gobos over the stage lanterns to create a dappled, leafy effect in the scenes that happen in "A Wood".
- It can also be used to indicate the time of day. Focusing a light through a yellow gel would create the impression that it's daytime, while using a dark purple gel would show that it's night.
- The colour of the lighting can create an impression of temperature. For example, a broad wash of pale blue light might be used to suggest that it's cold when Phil and Leah are alone together in "A Field". This would also highlight Phil's cold treatment of Leah using colour symbolism (see p.49).



This production used gobos to create a dappled lighting effect.

It can be used to support characterisation

- 1) Designers can use lighting to emphasise the qualities of a particular character. When Phil shows Cathy how to suffocate Adam in Act Three ("A Wood"), uplighting could be used to cast shadows over Phil's face and body. This would give him a threatening appearance and hint at his dangerous side.
- 2) Lighting could highlight a character's position in the group. The group leader at any given moment (e.g. John Tate or Phil) might be brightly illuminated by a sharply-defined beam to emphasise their importance, but other characters (e.g. Brian) might be more dimly lit. This would draw attention to the most authoritative member of the group.
- 3) It can also reveal more about the relationship between different characters. For example, Leah and Phil may be lit by separate spotlights in the scenes that take place in "A Field", with the rest of the stage very dimly lit. The darkness between the characters would highlight the emotional distance between them.

Power and Group Dynamics

The idea of power and authority within the group is a key theme in *DNA*, so it should be explored in detail — this can be done by both the designers and the actors.

Lighting

Lighting can create mood and atmosphere...

- 1) The colour of lighting can have a major impact on the mood and atmosphere of the play — it can provide the audience with a visual representation of how the characters are feeling. For example, in Act Four ("A Field"), the lighting might be dimmer and have colder tones than in previous "Field" scenes. This would help to create a gloomy mood that would reflect Phil's unhappiness after Leah has left.
- 2) A lighting designer might use colour symbolically. For example, red light may be cast across the stage using red gels to symbolise danger when Phil threatens to kill Brian in Act Two ("A Wood").

Colour Symbolism

Colour symbolism uses the feelings and ideas that are associated with certain colours to create meaning for the audience. It's mainly used in non-naturalistic productions and isn't limited to lighting — it could also be applied to other design elements, such as set design and costume.

- 3) The intensity of lighting can help to build tension. When John Tate threatens Richard in Act One ("A Wood"), a parcan could be used to cast an intense beam on Richard from above. This would highlight the pressure that Richard is feeling and add to the tension as the audience wonders how the conflict will be resolved.



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... and heighten the impact of key moments

- 1) Special lighting effects can be created to increase the impact of certain moments. For example, strobe lighting could be used when Adam describes his fall to the rest of the group. This would have a disorientating effect on the audience, and would reflect how confused and upset Adam feels.
- 2) When Leah talks to Phil about "déjà vu" at the end of Act Two, she may be lit by a Fresnel spotlight with a softly-defined, pale yellow beam. This slightly hazy lighting would create a surreal effect that would link to Leah's comment that "reality is not what we think".
- 3) An absence of light can also be effective in supporting the action of the play. For example, a blackout could be used when Phil puts a plastic bag over Brian's head in Act Three ("A Wood"). This would allow the audience to experience what Brian is going through. It would also avoid the actor playing Brian having a bag over his head for a prolonged period, which could be unsafe.

Effect on the Audience

A blackout would create tension, as the audience would only know that Brian is alive thanks to his speech and the sound of his giggling.



How many designers does it take to change a lightbulb...* Choose one of the "Field" scenes from the play. Make a list of all of the lighting techniques you would use in that scene, and the effects you want to create. You should cover the following:

- 1) The lighting equipment you would use.
- 2) The colour, direction and intensity of the lighting.
- 3) Any special lighting effects that might be created and how, as well as their desired effect on the audience.

- Tick list:**
- ✓ technical terminology
 - ✓ specific design details
 - ✓ effect on the audience