Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

DNA

Contents

1. Plot
2. Characters and themes
3. Context and form
4. How to get top marks
5. Key terms
6. Quick questions
7. What to do next

Plot

- A group of teenagers believe they have killed Adam, a younger boy they bullied, after he fell into a grille in a field during one of their dares.
- Phil, who barely speaks, takes control and plans a **cover-up**: they will plant DNA evidence to blame an imaginary man. But a real man who fits the description is arrested.
- Adam is found alive, living in a hedge and badly affected. Phil decides he cannot return, and sends Cathy and Brian to take him into the woods; it is implied he is killed.
- Leah, who talks constantly to the silent Phil, leaves the school. The group is changed: Brian is on medication, Cathy enjoys power, and Phil withdraws.

Characters and themes

- John Tate leads at first but loses control; Phil leads by planning; Leah questions what they have done; Cathy becomes ruthless.
- Themes: **responsibility** and guilt, leadership and power, **peer pressure**, morality, and violence.

Context and form

- Written by Dennis Kelly in 2008 for the National Theatre's youth theatre programme. Each of its four acts moves between a street, a field and a wood, and Leah's long speeches contrast with Phil's silence.

How to get top marks

- Use the form: broken, overlapping dialogue shows how the group talks without thinking.
- Write about **responsibility** and how fear controls the group. Phil's silences and Leah's **monologues** are great contrasts.
- Treat the group's **cover-up** as your central idea: what are they willing to do to stay safe?

Key terms

Monologue	A long speech by one character.
Peer pressure	Pressure from friends to behave a certain way.
Responsibility	Being accountable for your actions.
Cover-up	Hiding the truth about something wrong.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What do the teenagers believe they have done to Adam?
2. Who plans the cover-up?
3. How do they try to cover up what happened?
4. Where is Adam found?
5. Who talks almost constantly to Phil?
6. Who loses control of the group at the start?
7. Which theme is shown by the group blaming an innocent man?
8. What are the three settings that repeat in each act?

Answers

1. Killed him after a dare went wrong
2. Phil
3. By planting DNA evidence to blame an imaginary man
4. Living in a hedge
5. Leah
6. John Tate
7. Responsibility and guilt
8. A street, a field and a wood

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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