



WINCHESTER  
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## VI BOOK PLAY: *DNA* BY DENNIS KELLY

*DNA* was an intense production of a powerful modern script by Dennis Kelly. The situation is tautly presented with Mark (Zachary Lees, Freddie's) and Jan (Amare Moore, Trant's) starkly spotlit as they convincingly provide the connective tissue from one moment of the story to another.

A group of friends has bullied a boy, Adam, in an initiation to their gang. He has fallen to his death. One of the gang improvises a plan which will pin the death on an imaginary postman: it just requires a random adult male's DNA on a jumper belonging to the dead boy. But the gang members entrusted with this task use their *initiative* and acquire the DNA of a genuine postie, spiralling the situation out of control. To complicate matters, Adam, thought dead, and the subject of a murder inquiry, is alive. What to do?

At the heart of the play is the power dynamic between John Tate, initially the alpha male of the group; Richard, who has rivalled John previously; and the emerging figure of Phil, a startling study of a teenager with zero morals, given a revealing performance by Oscar Dunfield-Prayero (Freddie's). Initially John Tate (Jeshaiah Murray, Cook's) uses his physicality to dominate the situation, even when the taller Richard (Fabian Wolsey Pont, Kenny's) challenges him. Jeshaiah and Fabian excelled at this standoff. Sitting quietly, Phil was thinking. Oscar's (scripted) use of food and drink was deeply disturbing, every bite suggestive of some inner disturbance. With Phil was Leah, played with skill and confidence by Sofia Kavokin (Beloe's), who had the unenviable task of carrying scenes that gave her all the lines with Phil having almost nothing to say on stage. It's testament to both actors that the dynamic of their scenes was so natural and powerful. Strength in depth was provided by Xingchen Cao (Freddie's) as Brian, a study in traumatised youth, madly scuttling, laughing hysterically, and snacking on soil. Tully Conyers (Kenny's) as the resurrected Adam was all too believably damaged. Jason Nzewi (College) found the natural comedy in his role as Danny, a boy more worried about his CV and possible career as a dentist. Rounding off the ensemble were the brassy Cathy (Ines Brindle, Beloe's) and the unhappy Lou (Friedrich von Moltke, Cook's), bossed and demeaned: it is worth noting how natural was Friedrich's presence as a female within the ensemble. Gender-blind casting presents nothing but freedom on stage.

The play was ably supported by a team of six pupils in offstage roles, five staff were credited with thanks in the programme, and the production was ably directed by Mr Baddeley, to whom credit should go for an imaginative use of the theatre space, with tight blocking, and sound and lighting designs that powerfully complemented the acting.

James Methven, Head of English  
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