

WORKSHEET

The Visit

For the teacher, please note ...

The various tasks, activities and questions for learners are offered here as possible suggestions only. Feel free to 'pick-and-choose' those you think will work best with your class.

In the published text we offer, has footnotes, definitions, synonyms and paraphrases for what might be challenging vocabulary at B1 level. Explanations are offered in brackets. We suggest learners at B2 level place a masking card over such footnotes, so that they can focus on contextual meaning, without being unnecessarily distracted.

Leading in

(Tip: Try to engage with the storyline, the plot, and respond personally to the various characters. Talk about the text with friends: What sort of impact does it have on you? Put forward your own viewpoint wherever possible. Think about the themes and ideas.

Introduction

Drama needs a performance in the theatre to come alive. When reading the play beforehand, we need to imagine how it could be performed: how the actors might use facial expression, gestures, movement and various tones of voice.

Drama is about conflict. We need to identify the conflicts that emerge in the play. Which character(s) do we engage with most when they deal with such conflicts? Perhaps we empathize with them, and even identify with them? How do characters change in the course of the play? With this play, a play about personal responsibility and social morality, do they change for the better....or the worse?

Summary (Translated from Vienna's English Theatre's promotional brochure)

The students Abby, Jez and Lewis share a flat in an English university town. All three are quite different in character, but they get on well with one another. Abby comes from a family of teachers, and comes across as well brought up and organized in her life. Jez is an attractive and slightly spoilt upper-class young man, while Lewis, clever and extrovert, comes from a working-class family from the North of England.

One night, when they come home from a party in high spirits, they continue celebrating. They then get an unexpected visit. At first they think it's a complaint about making too much noise, but the woman – who presents herself as Detective Teena Whitsom – is there for a more serious matter. The almost lifeless body of a young woman has been found on the university campus. Her identity is

not known: all she had on her was a suicide note signed with a username. The young woman, believed to be a student, is now in intensive care in hospital. Frantic enquiries are being made to find out her identity. The user name leads to a Blog that the victim seems to have kept up for years. The Blog indicates that all three knew the girl. The highly determined Det. Whitsom is keen to interrogate each of the three in turn.

At first, each of them strongly denies knowing the victim. But a longer look at the photo of the victim finally awakes memories – memories that place them in an unfavourable light. In a tense claustrophobic atmosphere we learn of the steps that led to the gradual downward spiral in the girl's psychological life. Abby, Jez and Lewis have each contributed their share in her decline. At the time none of them attached any great importance to how they treated her. None of them need feel themselves guilty. But, while the story of the initially light-hearted and fun-loving girl materializes more and more, it becomes clear that casual individual actions can ultimately lead to a tragedy through an unfortunate chain of events. A person's vulnerable side is not always obvious; a hurtful comment or reaction can be enough to tip such a person over the edge. The news of the death of the unknown young woman hits the three of them hard.

After the detective has left and the shock slowly subsides, the three of them find strange inconsistencies about the Detective and how she has interrogated them. They soon believe they have worked out logically what they have just experienced: it must have been a very ingenious and nasty student prank. When they are about to revert to their drunken high spirits, Jez's mobile rings ...

The Title

Just looking at the title, 'The Visit', which 'visit' could this be? By whom? To whom?

Titles of novels and plays with the definite article and a single noun are often enigmatic, strange, mysterious. Think of Kafka's 'The Trial' and 'The Castle, and of Camus' 'The Misunderstanding'.

But how 'definite' is the title? What difference would a title like 'A Visit' make?

Is this why we call 'the' the 'definite article, and ' a' the 'indefinite article'?

Note: this play by Philip Dart was largely inspired by J.B. Priestley's 1946 play 'An Inspector Calls'.

The Characters

1. Draw a simple 'sociogram' showing the social inter-relationships between the characters. In your diagram use the vertical dimension to show the social positions of Jez ('posh' upper middle-class), Abby (lower middle-class) and Lewis (working class). Where would you put Teena Whitsom, the forceful female detective? Above the others in her role as controlling detective, or below the others as undermining their moral positions?
2. As you work through the play, add other characters who are mentioned, but who do not actually appear: Hannah, Ollie, Mark Thewlis, Ethan, Joe Williams, Toby Winthrop, Lucy Fenton, Charlie and Jade.
3. Which of the various subjects that Jez, Abby and Lewis are studying would you like to study at college or university? Sports Science, Politics, Drama, English, or ... ? Say why.
4. Which of the three students would you prefer to share a flat with, and why?

Setting

5. Jez, Lewis and Abby are studying at a 'provincial university town'. Which town could that be? Find out about the difference in England of old traditional universities (eg. 'Oxbridge'), 'red-brick' universities (eg. Birmingham), 'modern' universities (eg. Sussex) and 'former polytechnics' (eg. Northumbria).
6. Find out about the difference between a 'terraced house' (where the 3 students live) , a semi-detached house and a detached house.
7. Draw the stage-set for their living-room. Label it. Would you like to join them in their shared flat? Why (not)?

Working Out (while reading the play)

The play itself

8. What are your first impressions of the three characters?
9. What sort of lifestyle do they lead? Would you still like to join them? Why (not)?
10. What shows that there are social class differences between the three?
11. The game 'Never have I ever ... ' (using the present perfect tense) is about denying strongly that one has never done anything wrong. Try playing the game in small groups, suggesting forfeits!
12. Try reciting the English alphabet backwards in 20 seconds or less without pausing.
13. How do each of the three react when Detective Teena Whitsom appears?
14. What does Jez think the detective has come about?
15. "Turn the music off, will you?" Which form of the verb does the detective use? What does this say about her role?
16. Role-play the start of the three interviews that the detective has with each of the flatmates. Then imagine you yourself are a member of the shared flat. How would you answer?
17. "A young woman was found lying unconscious in the grounds of the university." What do you think happened?
18. In which ways do the attitudes of the three flatmates change when the detective explains why she is there?
19. "People hide their identities for all kinds of reasons", says the detective. Suggest some of the reasons why they do so.
20. When the detective says "I sincerely hope not, Mr Brokenshire" , which tone of voice does she use here, do you think?
21. Why does the detective show the picture only to Abby?
22. Find out about 'the sixth form', and how senior pupils gain access to an English university through their GCE 'A'-Levels.
23. Why do you think Lucy Fenton joined the drama club?
24. "Hold on, Abby's not like that." (p.15) What do you think? Could Abby be jealous?
25. "No, not really." Says Abby, when she is asked whether she was jealous of Lucy Fenton. How does Abby relativize her 'No'-answer here? What might this suggest?
26. Why does Abby 'play down' her angry reaction?

27. What are young girls like when they use Facebook, do you think?

28. Imagine you are Lucy Fenton on April 6, 2013. How would you challenge Abby? Which direct questions would you ask her?

29. Role-play the flashback between Abby and Lucy.

30. How guilty do you think Abby is for Lucy's situation?

31. Abby says: "It all came flooding back, like I was actually there." Did the scene really happen, or was it all in Abby's guilty imagination?

32. Was Abby's action only a 'prank', or ... ?

33. Do you really believe Jez has got 'some course work to write up'?

34. The detective talks about 'the interview'. But is it more a questioning, an interrogation, or even an enquiry, an investigation? Explain what you think it might be.

35. "Drinking vodka is probably not the best preparation for doing course work." To what extent do you agree. Say why you think that.

36. What is the difference between 'thinking' and 'knowing'? What is the detective focussing on here?

37. What do we learn from the second flashback?

38. Was the sex with Jez 'just a spur-of-the-moment thing' for Charlie, too? Explain.

39. What is it about Jez that makes Abby sick?

40. In which way did Jez use Charlie?

41. Check out the full text of the 2012 song by Mumford and Sons, 'I will wait'. How do you now read the extra three lines that Charlie added?

- Why does Charlie want to keep the baby?
- How would you describe Jez's attitude? (thoughtless, irresponsible, unfeeling, cruel, brutal, or ... ?)

42. From what Jez and Lewis say about Charlie/ Jade, which adjectives might describe her? (eg. nervous, depressive, vulnerable, mixed-up, manic, hysterical, ... ?) From what we now learn about her, how suitable or not are such adjectives?

43. "We all seem to be responsible in some way", says Abby.

- Draw up a list of the ways so far that Jez and Abby are each responsible for the girl's attempted suicide.

44. What sort of 'state' was she in when Lewis opened the door?

45. What do we learn from the fourth flashback?

46. What reason does Lewis give for selling drugs?

47. How do Abby, Jez and Lewis each react when they learn that the girl (Lucy/ Charlie/ Jade) only has a 50-50 chance of surviving?

48. How do they each express their shock and horror when they learn she has died?

49. How does Abby express her regret?

50. How do the three turn on each other with mutual recriminations?

51. Draw and label a downward spiral that charts Lucy's tragic decline.

52. "None of us are innocent here! We're all to blame, one way or another," says Jez.

- Draw a graph that shows the degree of guilt that Abby, Jez and Lewis each carry.

53. Lewis reminds the others of what the detective said: "In my experience, people hide their real identities for all kinds of reasons."

- How do you see the role of the detective in the play? Is she 'not what she seems'? What then? As a critical mirror to the others? As a moral inquisitor? As a God-like presence? As a devil's advocate? Or as a ... ?

54. Take the name 'A-B-B-Y'. Could it also be an anagram? What else could the letters spell?

55. Was the detective's visit just a hoax, or a fantasy, or a bad dream, or ... ?

56. "Let's just enjoy not actually feeling guilty," suggests Jez.

- But is this really possible now? Why (not)?

57. Are Lucy, Charlie and Jade different people, or not?

58. How do the three try to forget everything that has happened?

59. What exactly does Toby Winthrop say to Jez over the phone?

- Role play the scene, back-to-back, giving Toby's exact words.

60. How do the three react to this latest piece of news?

'Living through' (after reading the play)

A. To help you experience the text personally and directly, **role-plays** and other such **activities** can prove useful. From the tasks above, try using numbers: 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 20, 28, 29, 43, 47, 48, 51, 52, 54 and 59.

B. **Write** several entries for Lucy Fenton's **diary**.

C. **Contextualizing.** Who says this to whom, and when in the play? What or who is being talked about? (These 16 quotations are not in the chronological sequence of the play!)

1. "I've got some course work to write up."
2. "People hide their identities for all kinds of reasons."
3. "Maybe I went a bit far. Too far. I'm sorry."
4. "Christ, this is disgusting!"
5. "We're all to blame, one way or another."
6. "Then isn't it worth trying to work things out between us?"
7. "I'm not interested in any minor offence you may have committed."
8. "I've probably had enough of your chat-up lines."
9. "The important thing is for everyone to be completely truthful."
10. "Don't be such a hypocrite."
11. "Feel free to gaze in awe and admiration."
12. "Now we can never say sorry or make any kind of amends."
13. "I haven't come about the noise."
14. "It wasn't worth the hassle."
15. "Why would I be jealous?"
16. "To be honest, she became a bit of a pest."

D. Role of the Detective

A 'detective' is someone, usually a police officer, who detects, who seeks clues, when investigating a crime to find out who should be charged with committing the crime.

But this Detective plays different roles: she operates on different levels.

- a. In which ways is she single-minded and determined in following through her line of investigation?
- b. How does she persuade the three to reveal things that they would rather forget?
- c. What is mysterious about her? How does she manage to have secret information about each of the three? How can she take on different roles in the flashbacks?
- d. How would you describe her questioning? As an interview, interrogation, enquiry, investigation, or even inquisition?
- e. In how far does she hold a critical moral mirror up to each character? In how far is she a catalyst in their discovering their own guilt? The personified voice of social and moral conscience? An agent of moral justice? Or is she a psychological therapist? Or even an avenging angel? Or ... ?
- f. How important is her role as storyteller, filling in background details, pulling together the strings of the whole action in the play?
- g. Is she perhaps an imposter? A warning messenger in advance of the arrival of the 'real' Detective at the end, so that the three now have a chance to repent? Does she actually exist?

Task: As the Detective, write up your report after questioning the three.

E. The three characters and the question of guilt

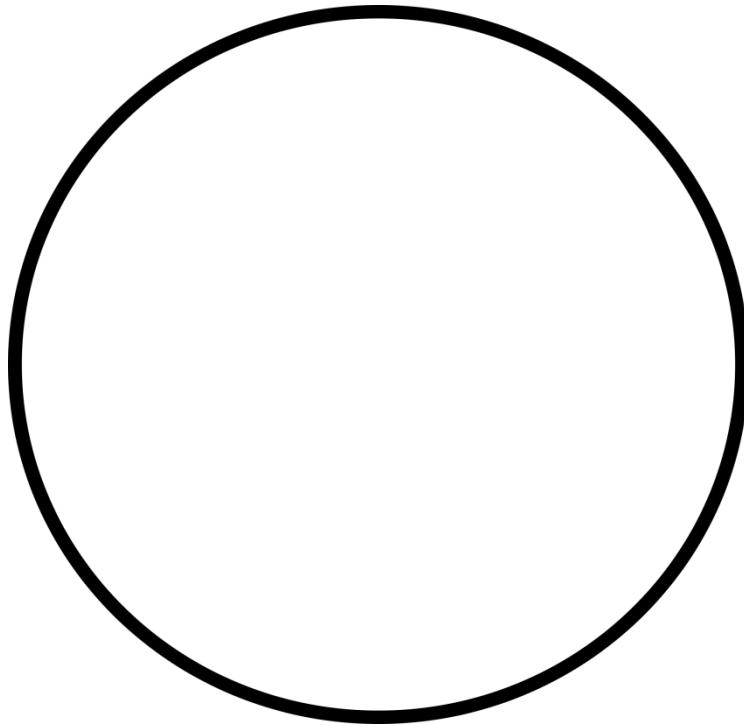
- Who, for *you*, is the most unsympathetic character of the three? Say why.
- 'Pride comes before a fall' is an English proverb. Jez regards himself as socially superior to both Abby and Lewis. Does this mean that his moral 'fall' is greater than that of the two others?
- All three, independent of one another, are *directly or indirectly* responsible for the suicide of one and the same person. Can we say any one is *more directly* responsible? (At the very end it seems as if a genuine police investigation into the suicide *will* be carried out.)
- The Detective demonstrates how every action and interaction can have an impact on others. A series of thoughtless, irresponsible actions can lead to tragic consequences. Have they ever thought about the consequences of their actions?

Summarize in note form:

<i>Person</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Impact on Lucy</i>
Jez
Abby
Lewis

- To what extent does each character accept responsibility for their actions?

Draw a large circle.



Divide the circle up into a 'pie-chart' to show the proportion of responsibility that each character has for the suicide, as you see it. Which character is most responsible for the death of Lucy Fenton? Make notes in the segment of your 'pie-chart', and discuss with one another.

- Do they accept responsibility too late?
- Do you think their feeling of guilt might plague them later in their lives? Why (not)?

F. The Language of Guilt

To help you in discussing the question of guilt, you may find these expressions useful.

- to be selfish, self-centred, egoistic, casual, indifferent, self-confident, self-satisfied, complacent, hypocritical,
- at fault; to be guilty of, culpable of, answerable for, responsible for sth.
- to defend os., to justify os., to give a reason or excuse for sth., to pretend to be innocent, to try and salve one's conscience, to resort to evasion, to deceive os., to carry out self-deception,
- to blame or criticize one another, to exercise mutual recrimination
- to face up to the facts, to examine one's conscience, to suffer pangs of conscience,
- to be shamefaced, ashamed,
- to be apologetic, remorseful; to feel regret, remorse
- to have a sense of personal responsibility for one's actions, and for the way these actions might affect others.
- to accept responsibility, to share guilt
- to learn a serious moral lesson; to try and make amends

Following up

G. Type of play (Genre)

1. How would you classify 'The Visit'? As a detective play? As a 'problem play'? As a social drama? Or as a ... ?
2. In which ways is 'The Visit' (a) similar to, but also (b) different from a conventional 'whodunnit', that is, a typical detective thriller (eg. by Agatha Christie)?
3. In how far does the play follow Aristotle's three classical Unities of Time, Space and Action?
4. Which advantages are there from setting 'The Visit' within a confined time and space, with only one main plot?
5. Compare this play with a medieval morality play, eg. 'Everyman' (c. 1490) or Hofmannsthal's 'Jedermann' (for the Salzburg Festival). Such a play showed the struggle between the forces of good and evil in a person's soul; it pointed out that person's sins and tried to get them to confess and repent.

H. Structure of the drama

1. The first quarter of the drama shows Abby, Jez and Lewis getting drunk and playing a game in their flat. Why do you think this aspect of their lifestyle is given so much space?
2. Why does the Detective show the photograph to only one person at a time? In how far does this add to the sense of mystery?
3. How does Philip Dart use suspense to create dramatic tension and pace?
4. How are the three stories (involving Abby, Jez and Lewis) linked?
5. How are the 5 'flashbacks' used? Only as episodes, or ... ?
6. The action is taken forward by the Detective questioning each of the three characters in turn. As the play progresses, how does the Detective's questioning become more forceful? How does she gradually gain more and more control of the situation?
7. Where could the chain of events be leading? Can we predict what will happen at the end?
8. Analyze how the play moves overall from the *amoral behaviour* of Abby, Jez and Lewis to how they come to understand what responsible *moral conduct* is all about.
9. Does the play have more a linear structure (with a beginning, middle and end) or a circular structure (with the action coming full circle)?
10. What is the impact of the telephone call at the end?
11. At the end, will the same woman detective come round to question the three?
12. How does the play subvert or undermine the conventions of time, place and reality?

I. Themes in the play

Draw *your own* mind-map to show how *you* see the various themes in the play.

Contrasting themes might include, among others:

selfish individualism	vs.	social responsibility
hypocrisy	vs.	honesty to oneself
lying	vs.	truthfulness
guilt	vs.	innocence
sexual lust	vs.	real love

indifference	vs.	regret, remorse
a fantasy detective	vs	a real detective
(illusion)	vs.	(reality)
.....	vs.

J. Staging the play

If you were directing 'The Visit' on stage,

- How can you ensure the production will have impact?
- Which opportunities could you use?
- Which problems might you meet?

In preparing for a performance of 'The Visit' we need to consider various stages: casting the roles, setting up the acting space, designing and making the costumes, collecting props, choosing the lighting, producing the music and sound effects, rehearsing the piece, organizing the venue, marketing the show, selling tickets, inviting journalists, and so on.

Casting

Put up on the wall a large outline drawing of each character. Invite ideas about the character's appearance, habits or mannerisms, and voice.

Note down the physical and vocal qualities that you would want each actor to have (eg. appearance, build, height; articulation, accent, fluency, stress and intonation). Write them down on the large drawing.

'Hot-seat' each actor to find out if they can actually identify with the role and can think as that character. That is, which questions would you ask when interviewing an actor for a role?

Staging

What sort of stage will you be using: end-on, thrust stage, proscenium arch, in-the-round, or ...?

Draw and label a 2-dimensional plan of the set, from a bird's eye view. (Use p. 4 of the script for details!)

Now make a 3-dimensional cardboard model of the set. Also make cardboard cut-outs of the 4 characters; fix a piece of wire to each, so that you can move the characters into different positions at particular moments of the action.

Using the model, explain to your actors where exactly you want them to be and how to move across the stage.

Costumes

Design the clothes for each of the 4 characters: their individual characteristics need to be expressed by the shape and colour of what they are wearing.

'Props' (stage properties, furniture, etc.)

Again, use p. 4 for details and check through the script for extras (eg. the photograph – or photographs? – that the Detective shows to each of the three).

Lighting

Think of the importance of impact: eg. at the start the stage could be in semi-darkness; the detective might cast a long shadow when she first arrives; each character could be in a spotlight when interrogated; at the end, as the truth emerges, the stage could be in full light.

Music and Sound effects

Check that the portable speakers are wired up to play the background music, that the doorbell and mobile phone rings are clear, that the sound effects to indicate the flashbacks actually work. Would you play 'I will wait' by Mumford and Sons at some point?

- Now that you have worked out how you would stage 'The Visit', see the production by Vienna's English Theatre. How does it compare with how you see the staging?
- Write a review of the performance you have experienced.

K. 'An Inspector Calls' (1946), by J.B. Priestley

Philip Dart's play 'The Visit' has, clearly, been inspired by J.B. Priestley's play: a literary classic that is current and timeless.

The three continuous acts of this play take place in the dining-room of the Birlings' house in Brumley, an industrial city of the North Midlands in England, in the spring of 1912. (There's a reference to the *Titanic* about to sail from Southampton!)

The play has an enduring power, and has been revived by the National Theatre in London in a much acclaimed production. The themes resonate for our time – and all times. The whole Birling family are involved in the suicide of Eva Smith. The play may stress the inequality of social class in Edwardian England, but the theme of social inequality is timeless.

Mrs Thatcher, Britain's former Conservative Prime Minister, may have claimed in the 1980s that there is 'no such thing as society', but this play argues strongly that we do need joint, indeed communal, social responsibility. We are all inter-related. 'No man is an island', wrote John Donne in the early 17th century.

A BBC TV adaptation of the play is readily available on DVD (BBC, 2015).

L. '13 reasons Why'

On May 22 2017 *Time* magazine published an article about a new Netflix series.

"There's been such an outpouring of emotion about the new Netflix series *13 Reasons Why*, about a teenage girl's suicide and its aftermath. It's truly graphic. We see the lead character, Hannah, lie in a

tub and slice into her forearms with a razor. We watch her die slowly. We see her mother cry out as she tries to pull her daughter's water-soaked body. There's no looking away.

And if that weren't enough, leading up to that scene, there's cyberbullying, self-harm, rape, sexual harassment, a fatal car crash – just about everything awful that can happen to a teen. *Hannah* narrates her story posthumously as a sort of crime drama via seven audio-cassettes that sequentially reveal the names of 13 people whose behaviour contributed to the 'reasons why' she killed herself.

For parents, this is a drawn-out horror movie, one that feels all too possible. Earlier this month, a new study of 32 children's hospitals across the country showed that admissions for suicidal behaviour and serious self-harm among 5- to 17-year-olds more than doubled between 2008 and 2015. That's just a tiny percentage of the kids who are experiencing major depression or anxiety or are hurting themselves in various ways, like cutting. Nationally across the US, 17.7% of teens reported seriously considering attempting suicide in 2015, according to the CDC.

Not surprisingly, the show that premiered on March 31 has become a binge-watching obsession among teens and tweens. Netflix doesn't publish ratings, but by social-media metrics, *13 Reasons Why*, based on the best-selling 2007 young-adult book by Jane Asher, is one of the network's biggest hits."

- In which ways does *13 Reasons Why* deal with similar situations to that in 'The Visit'?

A 'PS' (a Postscript)...

A *Schularbeit* on 'The Visit'?

Your teacher may want to set a 'Schularbeit' on 'The Visit' to help you on your way towards the new 'Standardisierte Reifeprüfung'. Teachers know that they can also use literary texts to help you with your language proficiency at B1 and B2 Levels.

The sorts of questions teachers may be tempted to ask you are:

- In which ways are each of the three characters Abby, Jez and Lewis involved in Lucy Fenton's suicide?
- Which changes do we see in the characters of the three in the course of the play?
- Do you think any of the characters learn anything in the course of the play? Which character, do you think, is most affected by the Detective's visit, and why?
- "Detective Teena Whitsom is not so much a character as a symbol." Discuss critically this statement.
- Explore the ways in which Philip Dart creates dramatic effects in the course of the play.
- Analyze how Philip Dart provides twists and surprises to build dramatic tension in the plot to the very end.

Wishing you all the best as you read, experience and explore 'The Visit' by Philip Dart!

Andrew Milne-Skinner