

# Lydia Hector the Word Collector

## ACT ONE

### PROLOGUE: THE WORD COLLECTOR

*A back drop of 'graffitied' words. A large dictionary is mounted on a lectern on one side downstage, a small chair and a desk with a big, colourful notebook and pencil on it are on the other side. Each character enters and adopts a position on stage. Lydia is the final character to enter. She sits at the desk and opens the notebook. She looks out and addresses the audience.*

LYDIA: My name is Lydia Hector and I collect words.

*Each time a definition is read, one of the performers stands at the dictionary lectern to deliver a meaning to the audience then exits.*

DEFINITION: Collect. Verb. Definition – bring or gather together.

DEFINITION: Word. Noun. Definition – A single distinct meaningful element of speech or writing used to form sentences with others.

LYDIA: I am . . . a collector.

DEFINITION: Collector. Noun. Definition – a person who collects things of a specified type, professionally or as a hobby.

*Each character announcing what they collect, steps forwards, addresses the audience and then exits.*

MIA: Keyrings.

HAWTHORN: Spiderman stickers.

OLIVIA: Enid Blyton's Famous Five books.

LILY: My Little Ponies.

NIAMH: Fossils.

ISABELLA: Secrets.

PHOEBE: Autographs of actors in Harry Potter.

LYDIA: *(Continuing to address the audience)* Words are cool. I can't get enough of them. Every day I hear more and more wonderful words and I just have to know what they mean. If I hear a word I like or one that intrigues me . . . I learnt that one only last week . . .

DEFINITION: Intrigue. Verb. Definition – arouse the curiosity or interest of.

LYDIA: I scribble it down in my notebook, sounding it out as best I can, and when I get home I go straight to my big dictionary to look up the definition.

DEFINITION: Definition. Noun. Definition – a formal statement of the exact meaning of a word.

BONNIE: (*To Lydia*) I don't know why you don't just ask me.

LYDIA: You're not likely to know any more than I do.

BONNIE: You'd be surprised what I know.

LYDIA: You'd just make it up.

BONNIE: How do you know?

LYDIA: Because that's what I would do.

BONNIE: So?

LYDIA: So . . . you're in my head so you would do what I would do. (*To the audience*) I'm not crazy by the way. This is my imaginary friend.

DEFINITION: Imaginary. Adjective. Definition – Existing only in the imagination.

LYDIA: Most kids do have imaginary friends when they're little. Mine's just hanging around a bit longer than I expected.

BONNIE: (*To the audience*) I'm called Bonnie, although it was Bobo to begin with when I used to be a guinea pig. Then I was a Golden Labrador for a few months and that's when my name changed to Bonnie.

LYDIA: She's a girl now.

BONNIE: I have been for several years but I don't seem to be getting any older.

LYDIA: I don't really need her anymore.

BONNIE: Everyone needs an imaginary friend.

LYDIA: Do they?

BONNIE: Yes. It's the only way you can guarantee to get a sensible conversation.

LYDIA: (*To herself*) Guarantee? That's a good word. I wonder what it means.

*Lydia writes the word down.*

LYDIA: (*To the audience*) When I was younger, I needed an imaginary friend because I didn't have many real ones. But now . . . I've got loads of people in my life.

*Lydia approaches Dora and stands by her as they both address the audience.*

LYDIA: This is Dora.

DORA: I'm her best friend.

LYDIA: We're in the same class at school.

DORA: We never fall out.

LYDIA: Well, almost never.

DORA: My favourite word is fidget.

DEFINITION: Fidget. Verb. Definition – make small movements through nervousness or impatience.

*Exit Dora with the 'definition performer'. Lydia moves over to Iris. They stand next to each other as they address the audience.*

IRIS: I'm Iris.

LYDIA: She's my sister.

IRIS: (*Firmly*) Older sister.

LYDIA: We get on some of the time.

IRIS: Most of the time she drives me mad.

LYDIA: That's what younger sisters are supposed to do.

IRIS: She's so annoying.

LYDIA: That's my job.

IRIS: My favourite word is awesome.

DEFINITION: Awesome. Adjective. Definition – Inspiring awe, excellent.

*Exit Iris with the 'definition performer'. Lydia moves over to Clover. They stand next to each other as they address the audience.*

LYDIA: This is Clover.

CLOVER: I live next door.

LYDIA: She's in year six. Well, she would be in she went to school.

CLOVER: I'm educated at home. My Mum teaches me.

LYDIA: I didn't even know that was allowed.

CLOVER: My favourite word is Labyrinth.

DEFINITION: Labyrinth. Noun. Definition – a complicated irregular network of passages or paths.

*Exit Clover with the 'definition performer'. Lydia moves over to Milly. They stand next to each other as they address the audience.*

LYDIA: This is Milly.

MILLY: We're cousins.

LYDIA: I love her.

MILLY: *(To Lydia)* Love you too, Couz.

LYDIA: She's loud . . .

MILLY: *(Shouting out)* Blah!!

LYDIA: And silly . . .

MILLY: What do you call a wizard with a cold? Harry Snotter!

LYDIA: And so much . . .

MILLY: *(Shouting out)* Let's party!

LYDIA: Fun!

MILLY: My favourite word is dungarees.

DEFINITION: Dungarees. Noun. Definition – trousers with a bib held up by straps over the shoulders, made of denim or similar material and worn for work or leisure.

*Exit Milly with the 'definition performer'. Bonnie approaches Lydia.*

BONNIE: Do you what to know what my favourite word is?

LYDIA: It's the same as mine.

BONNIE: How do you know?

LYDIA: Because you're in my imagination.

BONNIE: What is it then?

LYDIA: Well, it changes all the time. But at the moment, it's one I learnt in science. It's the word omnivorous.

DEFINITION: Omnivorous. Adjective. Definition – Feeding on a variety of food of both plant and animal origin.

*Exit Bonnie with the 'definition performer'*

LYDIA: *(To the audience)* It all starting about a year ago, when I was eight years old in Class 4A of Bluebell Road Primary School.

*Exit Lydia. A school bell rings.*

## **SCENE ONE: FIRST WORDS**

*The following characters enter dressed in school uniform and gather in the following groups: Dora, Lucy & Kate; Brianna & Phoebe; Mia, Freya, Aimee & Zoe; Niamh is alone; Olivia is also alone but has her nose in a book.*

PHOEBE: *(Indicating Olivia to Brianna)* Look Brianna, she's reading again.

BRIANNA: That's because she hasn't got anyone to hang around with.

PHOEBE: Shall we let her join us?

BRIANNA: Are you kidding? She's boring. She only ever talks about school.

PHOEBE: She might help us with that homework.

BRIANNA: That's true. (*Calling over*) Olivia! Do you want to spend playtime with us?

OLIVIA: (*Calling back*) No thanks. I'm reading.

BRIANNA: (*To Phoebe*) Told you. Boring.

ZOE: Did you see Lydia had to stay back and talk to Miss Simpson?

FREYA: Yes. I wonder what that was about.

AIMEE: Miss Simpson looked serious.

MIA: (*Looking off*) Here comes Lydia now.

*Enter Lydia. She walks over to join Dora, Lucy and Kate.*

DORA: (*To Lydia*) What did she say?

LYDIA: She said that I needed to concentrate more in lessons.

LUCY: Did she tell you off?

LYDIA: No. She just said that I should stop daydreaming and start listening.

KATE: How does she know you're not listening? Just because you're staring out of the window . . .

LYDIA: I wasn't staring out of the window . . .

DORA: You were staring out of the window. For a long time.

KATE: (*To Dora*) But she still might have been listening.

LYDIA: Miss Simpson said that she could tell I wasn't listening because every time she asked me a question I gave her a bewildered look.

LUCY: What does that mean?

LYDIA: I don't know. (*To the audience*) And there it was. The word that began it all. Bewildered. I went to ask my sister Iris when I got home from school.

*Exit the pupils. Enter Iris, talking on her phone.*

IRIS: (*Into phone*) No, I didn't see him today . . . He wasn't on the bus . . . Was he wearing her scarf?

LYDIA: Iris, what does 'bewildered' mean?

IRIS: (*Into phone*) I knew it wouldn't last. (*To Lydia*) I'm on the phone.

LYDIA: (*To the audience*) She's always on the phone. She even sits talking on it in the bath. Nan says if she's not careful she'll get electrocuted to death like Valerie Barlow in Coronation Street.

IRIS: (*To the audience*) Whoever that is!

LYDIA: (*To Iris*) Do you know what 'bewildered' means?

IRIS: Look it up in a dictionary.

LYDIA: Have we got one?

IRIS: No. But Grandad has.

*Exit Iris. Lydia sits at the desk.*

LYDIA: So that night, after tea, I went round to Nan and Grandad's with Mum. They were having cod roe on toast at the kitchen table. Grandad said that his dictionary was by his arm chair to help him with the crosswords. I walked into the living room to get it. There on the floor tucked between his armchair and the settee was a book that would change my life forever.

*The dictionary is lit up as a chorus of heavenly voices sing out.*

DEFINITION: Dictionary. Noun. Definition – A list of the words of a language in alphabetical order with their meanings.

LYDIA: I quickly flicked through the pages to find the word bewildered. A. B. B-E. B-E-W.

DEFINITION: Bewildered. Adjective. Past tense. Definition – Perplexed or confused.

LYDIA: I looked up the word roe, as in cod roe, while I was there.

DEFINITION: Roe. Noun. Definition – The mass of eggs contained in a female fish or shellfish, used as food.

LYDIA: Urgh! Gross . . . I rushed home, found an old, empty notebook and wrote both of the words and their meanings inside. (*Writing the words down*) Bewildered. Roe.

## **SCENE TWO: NEW GIRL**

*Lydia stands up and turns her chair round to face stage left.*

LYDIA: (*To the audience*) I've added tons of words to my notebook since then and I keep collecting more and more each day. I'm in year five now and Iris is in year eight.

*Enter Iris, carrying a chair. She places it next to Lydia's as if making the front seats of a bus.*

LYDIA: (*Leaning round Iris to address the audience*) Every morning we catch the bus into Butterford to go to school.

IRIS: I'm at Henry Franklin Academy.

LYDIA: And I'm at Bluebell Road Primary School.

IRIS: The rule is that Lydia is allowed to sit next to me until we get to the next stop. That's when my best friend Caitlin gets on.

*Caitlin enters with a chair and sets it down several places behind the other chairs.*

LYDIA: And that's when I have to move and sit at least three places away so I can't hear what they're talking about.

*Caitlin sits next to Iris.*

CAITLIN: Hey Iris.

IRIS: Hey.

CAITLIN: Did you get that homework done?

IRIS: Yeah o' course. It's for Mr Butler and you know what he's like.

CAITLIN: I know. I'm in so much trouble.

IRIS: You mean you haven't done it?

CAITLIN: No. I had another massive argument with Sheena last night.

IRIS: The Wicked Stepmother.

CAITLIN: Exactly. Just couldn't get my head round the work.

IRIS: (*Reluctantly*) S'pose I could let you copy mine but don't make it look noticeable.

CAITLIN: Oh, thanks Iris. You're a pal.

LYDIA: (*To the audience*) At the next stop, loads of kids normally pile on board including my bus friend, Isabella.

*Enter the following characters, who set the chairs they're carrying down as if to make more seating on the bus: Isabella, Phoebe, Freya, Georgia, Courtney, Olivia & Mia. Isabella puts her chair next to Lydia.*

LYDIA: (*To the audience*) Isabella is older than me. She goes to Iris's school but I think she's in the year below. She is very individual and likes to do her own thing.

ISABELLA: (*To the audience*) I used to sit by myself on the bus. Then one morning Lydia ended up next to me and now I get her to save a seat for me.

LYDIA: (*To the audience*) She doesn't fit in but, then again, I don't think she really wants to.

ISABELLA: (*To Lydia*) So . . . cryptogram. Did you find out what it means?

LYDIA: (*To the audience*) Every afternoon, on our journey home, Isabella gives me a word for my collection. I have to find out what it means and tell her the following morning. (*To Isabella*) Obviously . . .

DEFINITION: Cryptogram. Noun. Definition – A text written in code.

ISABELLA: *(To Lydia)* You never let me down. *(Showing Lydia a gemstone necklace)* Do you like this?

LYDIA: I love it.

ISABELLA: It's made of amber. The strongest of magical gems because it holds the power of the sun. It replaces unhappiness with bright, solar energy. The Chinese believed that it was formed from drops of dragon's blood which became solid when they hit the ground.

LYDIA: *(Impressed)* Wow.

ISABELLA: The Romans believed, that as a talisman, Amber protected the body from physical harm and Gladiators would often carry such a charm for protection.

LYDIA: A talisman?

ISABELLA: Your bonus word for the day. Find out what it means at school.

LYDIA: *(Getting her notebook out)* How do you spell it?

ISABELLA: T-a-l-i-s-m-a-n. Now on to more important things, what will you do in the event of a zombie invasion?

LYDIA: I don't believe in zombies.

ISABELLA: Neither do I. But it pays to be prepared.

*Enter Poppy, carrying a chair. She walks passed everyone to get to the 'back of the bus' and sits on the chair.*

CAITLIN: *(To Iris)* Who's that?

LYDIA: *(To the audience)* It was a new girl.

IRIS: *(To Caitlin)* Dunno. Never seen her before.

CAITLIN: She's wearing our school uniform.

IRIS: What's she look like?

*Caitlin turns around and looks towards the back.*

IRIS: Don't stare.

CAITLIN: So how am I s'posed to see what she looks like?

IRIS: 'Ave a look but do it discreetly.

CAITLIN: I'll pretend to do my shoe up.

*Caitlin bends down and looks back.*

IRIS: Well?

CAITLIN: Bit of a square. Not someone we'd hang out with.



IRIS: Who she sat with?

CAITLIN: By herself.

IRIS: Wonder what year she's in?

CAITLIN: Dunno. (*Turning back*) Anyway, I best get on with my homework.

IRIS: You mean my homework.

SAMPLE