Boys Don't Cry Knowledge Organiser

Context

- Malorie Blackman was already a highly regarded, best-selling author when Boys Don't Cry was published in 2010.
- **LGBTQ+** - In 2006 a BBC radio DJ was accused of being homophobic for using the word 'gay' as a derogatory term to mean 'rubbish'. This caused outcry with lots of people complaining. It triggered the Get Over It campaign by the LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall. Part of the campaign was to challenge the way that the term 'gay' was used in everyday language. Blackman uses the assault on Adam as a way of showing the consequences of not challenging hateful language.
- **Toxic Masculinity** – This term was first created in the 1980s and refers to certain traits and behaviours that are stereotypically associated with men and that are considered harmful to all members of society. For example, the view that men should not express their feelings leads to increased aggression and depression in men.
- **Financial Stability** – At the start of 2008 there was a global financial crisis and in 2009 there was a sharp increase in the unemployment rate. This is shown in the novel as Dante struggles to find employment.

Key Words

- **Toxic Masculinity:** stereotypically male behaviours that are harmful to men and society as a whole.
- **Dual Narrative:** A story told from two different perspectives.
- **Catalyst:** A substance that increases the rate of reaction, but can be recovered, unchanged at the end.
- **Empathy:** The ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in their situation.
- **Turning Point:** The turning point or climax is the point of highest tension in the novel. It is the most exciting part.
- **First Person:** First person is the term used to describe a text written from the perspective of the narrator.

Key Characters

- **Dante** – Father of Emma, strained relationship with his dad, very intelligent and hard-working.
- **Adam** – Dante's younger brother, wants to be an actor, there is an instant bond between Adam and Emma.
- **Tyler** – Widow, raising Dante and Adam alone. Had to give up his career dreams to be a father.
- **Emma** – Daughter of Dante and Melanie. Her arrival forces Dante to put his dreams on hold.
- **Melanie** – Emma's mother who leaves Emma with Dante believing that she has a better chance in the stable family.
- **Collette** – Dante's girlfriend, told Veronica that Dante doesn't want Emma.
- **Jackie** – Dante's mother's sister. Offers Dante support and advice but can be acerbic (sharp).
- **Veronica** – Collette's sister and is a social worker.
- **Josh** – One of Dante's friends. Led the attack on Adam whom he previously had a relationship with.
- **Logan** – Another of Dante's friends. Enjoys stirring up trouble and holds Dante back during Adam's attack.
- **Paul** - One of Dante's friends.

Plot Summary

Chapters 1-12

Dante waits for his exam results.
Melanie arrives with a baby and tells Dante he is the father. She goes to the shops but does not return. Adam congratulates Dante on his results but Tyler is unimpressed. Tyler discusses the responsibilities of parenthood with Dante, who struggles to bond with Emma.

Chapters 13-30

Dante buys a DNA kit, Emma is his daughter.
Adam tries to discuss his homosexuality with Dante but Dante refuses to accept it. Dante takes Emma to the bar where his friends are rude to Adam. Aunt Jackie arrives. Adam is in a relationship with someone who is ashamed of being gay.

Chapters 31-39

Collette's sister Veronica visits Dante, leaving him feeling unsettled. Dante breaks up with Collette. Adam breaks up with his secret partner. Dante celebrates his 18th by going to the bar. Josh, Logan and Paul assault Adam violently. The police question Dante about the assault. Jackie accuses Tyler of never talking about his feelings. Adam's injuries are severe and his headaches were caused by a subdural haematoma.

Chapters 40-50

Dante seeks revenge and attacks Josh. During the attack, Dante learns Josh is gay. Adam has withdrawn from the family and is given a

Themes

- **Friendship** – Dante becomes more isolated from his friends once he has Emma, leaving him lonely. Dante wants revenge on his friend Josh for the attack on Adam.
- **Family/Parenting** – Family is central to the novel. Although Dante and Adam bicker, they are loyal and defend each other. We can also see this theme through the relationship the boys have with their father. Tyler talks about the need to provide for one's family, doing whatever it takes to support them. Jackie (the boys' aunt) presents the difficulties of family life.
- **Money** – Money is a significant concern for Dante. In C1, he talks about paying off his student loan after university showing he does not have the money to go without support. His family have not had a holiday for a long time. Dante appears to be motivated by money. His first concern about raising Emma is that he has "no money".
- **Identity** – Masculinity is a key theme throughout the novel, with Blackman referencing stereotypes throughout the novel to challenge gender inequality. Adam accepts his sexuality, but Josh does not. Many people around Adam find his sexuality difficult.
- **Secrecy** – Throughout the novel, Blackman makes links between secrecy and misery. Melanie kept her pregnancy and her location a secret when she leaves Emma with Dante. Adam keeps his relationship with Josh a secret from his family, and Josh's sexuality is kept a secret until the latter part of the novel.