

Lesson Plan

Level 5



Murder by Art Janet McGiffin

Aims

- to encourage students to try some creative writing
- to stimulate students to read the book

1. Tell students the title of the book and that it is a murder mystery story. Ask them what they would expect to happen in a murder mystery story and write their answers up on the whiteboard.
Possible answers: at least one person is murdered; someone (often a detective) is trying to find out who did it and why; there will usually be some 'red herrings' along the way – i.e. the writer will try to make us think someone is guilty when they're not.
2. Ask students to read Extract 1, which is a list of characters in the book. Tell students that Soren Berendorf dies in the story. Now divide students into small groups and ask them to discuss how Soren might have died and who killed him. Get the groups to report back to the whole class.
3. Tell students that they are going to be writing the scene where Soren dies, and that they will be trying to create a scary atmosphere. To prepare for this, ask the students to call out suggestions for suitably atmospheric vocabulary. They can use their bilingual dictionaries if necessary. When describing their scene, students should try to imagine not only what can be seen, but what can be heard, what smell is in the air, how certain objects feel. They should also think about how the character(s) feel mentally and physically. You might find it helpful to focus on each of the five senses in turn (e.g. words to create a scary atmosphere connected with hearing might include: scream, gasp, bang, crunch, footsteps, pounding (heart), etc.). When students have finished writing, ask them to read out their work to the others in their group for feedback. Is the writing believable? Does it have the right atmosphere?
4. Give each student the name of one of the characters from the book and give them a little time to think about what their character might be like – they might find it helpful to write some notes. Now tell them to imagine that their character killed Soren and ask them to start a piece of writing with the words 'I wanted to murder Soren because ...' When everyone has finished, ask students to share their work with the whole class. Now ask students to vote for who they think killed Soren.
5. Tell students that someone else dies in *Murder by Art*. Ask them who they think it is, and why and how he/she dies.
6. Ask students to read Extract 2, which is a description of some pieces of art that appear in the book. Tell them that Soren was killed by one of these works of art. Working in their small groups, ask them to guess which work of art killed Soren and how. Now ask students to think of other works of art (especially modern art) they have seen in galleries or museums. Can they think of ways these could be used as murder weapons? (e.g. hit on the head by Carl André's *Bricks* from the Tate Gallery, London, or drowned in Damien Hirst's *Mother and Child, Divided* – a cow and calf in formaldehyde.) If you have enough, you could make a list and construct a top ten of art works murder weapons.
7. Remind students that Dr. Maxine Cassidy, one of the main characters in the book, is a doctor at Mercy Hospital ER. Ask students what type of person they think makes a good ER doctor.
Possible answers: He/she should be a skilled doctor; able to think and make sensible decisions quickly based on what he/she knows and sees; able to stay calm under pressure; logical (teach also 'analytical'); observant (adj. from 'observe'); questioning.
Now ask them what sort of person they think would make a good detective like Detective Grabowski in the story.

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Possible answers: someone curious, determined, intelligent, logical, observant, patient, quick-thinking, knowledgeable (adj. from 'knowledge') about people / human behaviour, suspicious.

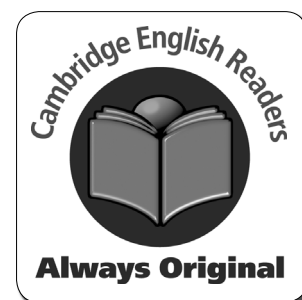
Draw attention to the fact that both jobs demand many similar qualities and get them to discuss why this might be. Can they see any similarities between the work of a doctor and that of a detective?

Suggested answer: Doctors can be seen as medical detectives. They are presented with 'clues' in the form of symptoms. They must examine these clues, combine them with what they know and research what they don't know, to come up with a correct diagnosis, i.e. solve the 'mystery'.

8. Ask students to write a scene where Maxine and Grabowski talk about Soren's death. They should use dialogue only and aim to incorporate details that reflect some of the personal qualities noted in Exercise 7. Now ask them to find a partner and take turns to read their written work out, with one student as Maxine and the other as Grabowski.
9. Ask students to look at Extract 3. This is a scene that takes place in Mercy Hospital ER. It has been mixed up. Divide students into pairs and ask them to work together to put the scene in the right order. Alternatively, you could give each pair a numbered part of the extract and ask students to walk around the room reading out their piece to each other until they think they know the right order. The pairs could then line up across the room and take it in turns to read their piece out. Does the scene make sense, or do any of the pairs need to swap places?
Correct order: e, h, j, a, f, k, c, g, b, i, d, l.
10. If there are enough copies of *Murder by Art* to go round, give them out and ask students to start reading.

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Extract 1

Dr. Maxine Cassidy: a doctor at Mercy Hospital ER

Shirley: the head nurse at Mercy Hospital ER

Detective Grabowski: a police officer; Maxine's friend

Dr. Leo Hochstedder: a specialist in lung diseases

Lillian Hochstedder: Leo's wife; an artist and co-owner of the Art Space

Helen Mueller: the business manager and co-owner of the Art Space

Louie: Maxine's neighbor; the owner of Louie's Antique Shop

Soren Berendorf: a famous artist

Wyoming Syzinski: an artist; Grabowski's friend

Rolondo: a gang leader

Rosa Jones: Rolondo's girlfriend

Latoya Thompson: Rolondo's neighbor; shares an apartment with Rosa

Officer Koranda: the night guard at the Police Crime Lab

Extract 2

- a) Soren Berendorf's collection *Wood Shapes* was arranged around the large room. They were smooth shapes of wood painted different colors. The largest shape hung by a rope over the center of the room. It was made of twelve chairs tied together. Each chair was painted a different color. A thick rope went up from the chairs to a large hook in the ceiling. Then the rope went down to the floor, where it was tied to a hook by the food table.
- b) On the second floor was a large room where people were looking at a collection of strange statues. The statues were twelve life-size heads sitting on tall platforms. Each head was painted white, brown or black.

"This is my work," said Lillian proudly to Maxine. "The heads are made of clay. The eyes are glass and the teeth are shells."

Extract 3

- a) "I was standing in front of our building talking to our new neighbor. Two men drove by in a car and shot us!" Rosa replied.
- b) "I don't know. He moved into our building only last week."
- c) "Talk later." Maxine put a needle in Rosa's arm.
- d) "Grabowski's friend!" said Maxine.
- e) Shirley and the EMT brought in the two people from the ambulance. The man was wearing jeans and a white T-shirt. The woman was wearing a red miniskirt and a tight purple blouse.
- f) "Did you see their faces?" asked Rolondo.
- g) Shirley opened the man's shirt. "He's bleeding a lot, but he's still breathing," she said. "What's this man's name, Rolondo?"
- h) "Rosa!" shouted Rolondo. He grabbed the hand of the woman wearing the red miniskirt. "Dr Maxine, this is my girlfriend, Rosa Jones."
- i) Shirley reached into the man's pocket and took out his wallet. "Wyoming Syzinski, it says on his driver's license."
- j) Maxine examined the girl. She had been shot, but she was awake. "What happened, Rosa?" she asked.
- k) "Yes," said Rosa. But then she closed her eyes.
- l) Shirley called the surgery unit to let them know that two patients with gunshot wounds were in the ER and needed surgery. Quickly two nurses arrived to take them to surgery.