

Strong Medicine

Aims

- To introduce students to the California setting.
- To introduce students to some of the characters and the background to the story.

1 Tell students that the story takes place in Santa Cruz in California. Ask them what they know about California as a place and the kind of lifestyle associated with it. Ask them to share their ideas with a partner, then call back answers from the whole class and list them on the board.

Possible answers: warm weather; beautiful Pacific coastline; good wine; orange juice; Green because of Arnold Schwarzenegger; famous cities – Los Angeles, San Francisco; Spanish spoken a lot; ‘beautiful’ people; unusual/‘alternative’ lifestyles; music and the arts very important.

Ask students to read the California extracts and list what aspects of life are described there. They can then compare what they read with the ideas listed on the board. Call back their answers.

Answers: beach life – sports (volleyball, surfing, jogging), man with snake, fishing, sealions, music; wine and food; mountain lions.

2 Tell students that Dr Mark Latto goes from his small town in the south of Scotland to meet Dr Deborah Spencer in California. They both treat patients with Parkinson’s Disease and are committed to their work. Ask students what they know about Parkinson’s.

Possible answers: It’s an illness usually associated with the elderly; it makes people shake; they lose their ability to walk easily or show expressions on their face; dressing and eating can be difficult.

Tell them that while Latto uses western medicine, Spencer uses her own new alternative techniques to treat patients and is developing a new medicine which Latto is interested to learn about. Ask students what they know about the differences between alternative (or complementary) medicine and traditional western medicine.

Possible answers: Alternative treatments often involve herbal remedies and massage; western medicine often involves using chemical drugs and surgery.

Ask them if they know of any conflicts between western and alternative medicine.

Possible answers: Many western doctors don’t believe alternative techniques work; health services are often reluctant to pay for certain kinds of alternative treatment.

3 Tell students that when Mark Latto gets to Deborah Spencer’s house, he discovers that she’s dead and the police are there. Ask them to read Extracts 1 to learn about some of the things that happen to Latto during his first few days in California.

Answers: Latto is questioned by the police about Spencer and told to stay in Santa Cruz; he goes to Spencer’s house at night, finds someone stealing her laptop and is attacked himself; he sees someone stealing his laptop from his room.

4 Ask students to read Extracts 2 and compare the reactions of Detective Martinez and Dr Latto to the events that happen. Ask them how the two men’s ideas are different, and to suggest why this might be. Encourage students to consider how Dr Latto must be feeling about the events that have taken place.

Possible answers: Martinez, being a policeman, is always very careful and reluctant to jump to conclusions without any proof. He looks for facts, and tries to explain things as being simple chance events initially. Latto immediately seems suspicious and tries to link all the events together. Latto is almost certainly tired, possibly jet-lagged, shocked and upset; he is also in a new place and cultural environment, so probably quite disoriented, too.

Tell students that despite the differences in the two men’s perspectives on events, Dr Latto later comments on the similarities he sees in the work of a doctor and that of a detective. Ask students to discuss this idea in pairs and offer an explanation for Latto’s suggestion. Call back ideas from the whole class. Ask students to read Extract 3 to find out how close they were to Latto’s idea.

5 Ask students to discuss in pairs what reasons they can think of for crime and the treatment of Parkinson’s disease (or any other medical condition) to become connected. Call back suggestions from the whole class. Ask them to look at the Characters list to see if that gives them any other clues.

6 Given what they have learned about Deborah Spencer, her work, her sudden death and the circumstances surrounding it, ask students to work in pairs to discuss the following questions: Did Deborah Spencer die, or was she murdered? Why was Latto attacked? Why were Spencer’s and Latto’s laptops stolen? Call back suggestions in a whole-class setting.

7 Ask students to work in their pairs to write an email from Mark Latto to his brother in Britain. Tell them to choose an appropriate and original ‘subject’ for the email. Ask them to include details of Latto’s impressions of California compared to his home town in Scotland, how he is feeling about what has happened since his arrival in Santa Cruz; and what he believes has happened to Deborah Spencer and why.

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California

- a As he looked down on the beach, he could see a few people already playing volleyball. Over to the right . . . there were about twenty surfers out on their surfboards.
- b There was a group of men and women making music on the beach – some of them playing guitars. There was a man with a snake round his shoulders walking past Casey's.
- c At eight o'clock Latto woke to the sound of the sea lions under the wharf.
- d He read, 'Danger – Mountain Lions'. Below that it told you what to do if you met a mountain lion. 'Don't worry about that,' said Martinez. 'Lions come out of the countryside into the arboretum all the time, but we'll be staying close to these buildings. They won't come down here.'
- e Latto and Koning had had an excellent meal and were enjoying the last of a rich white wine from the Santa Cruz mountains.
- f It was a lovely sunny March day. West Cliff Drive was busy with joggers and people walking their dogs.
- g A van was taking food and drink to one of the restaurants at the end of the wharf. A few men and women were fishing from the side.

Extracts 1

- a 'When did you arrive in the States?' Martinez asked. 'Yesterday afternoon,' replied Latto . . . 'How long are you staying?' asked Martinez. 'Well, I was planning to stay for a couple of weeks. Now – I don't know.' Martinez stood up. 'Well, you can't leave town just yet,' he said. ' . . . On your way out tell Officer Seymour where you're staying. Oh – and ask me if you want to leave town.'
- b While he was eating, he . . . realised that he had left his sunglasses . . . at Deborah Spencer's house. It was possible the police were still at the house so he decided to walk up there . . . The front door . . . was open a little . . . Everything was quiet . . . Latto looked up the stairs. He thought he heard a noise . . . Latto had just begun to move towards the door when suddenly it was thrown wide open and a young man almost ran out of the room. He looked angry. Under his left arm he was carrying a laptop computer, in his right hand was an empty plant pot . . . The plant pot hit the side of Latto's head hard and broke into pieces.
- c 'What's the matter?' she asked, looking up at him. 'There. My room.' They both looked up at the motel to see someone climbing out of Latto's window . . . There was something under the robber's arm, but Latto couldn't see what it was . . . Latto unlocked the door and turned on the light. His suitcase was open on the bed. His computer was missing.

Extracts 2

- a About Deborah Spencer's death:
Martinez: 'I mean, nobody's broken into the house. Nobody's been fighting in the house. She doesn't seem to have taken her own life . . . It looks as if she just died. I'm sorry, but sometimes it just happens.'
Latto: As a doctor, he knew that sometimes people did just die. A sudden heart problem or something like that. It happened, but it was unusual. And it was very unusual if the person was a healthy, happy forty-two-year-old woman, in a caring profession, and with everything to live for.
- b About the attack on Latto:
Martinez: 'It's probably some . . . clever kid who saw the police cars earlier and realised the house was going to be empty tonight. Thought he could steal a few things and make a bit of money.'
Latto: Latto thought about the man with the ear-ring. A death and then a robbery in the same house on the same day . . . it couldn't just be chance.
- c About the theft of Latto's laptop:
Martinez: 'Of course . . . if it's a very new laptop you could get about \$500 for it on the street. That would buy a few drugs.'
Latto: As he lay waiting for sleep to come, he asked himself why someone might have wanted *his* computer. What could he have that might be of interest? Then in the last few minutes before he fell asleep, he realised what they wanted and how they had found out it was there.

Extracts 3

- 'That's good work,' said Martinez, when Latto finished. 'You'd make a good detective.'
Latto smiled. 'It's not unlike being a doctor,' he said. 'A doctor looks at what's happening to a patient's body and works out what the illness is. A detective just looks at what's happening and works out who the criminal is.'
Martinez laughed. 'An interesting way of putting it,' he said.

Characters

- Deborah Spencer:** an American doctor of Chinese medicine
Mark Latto: a British doctor
Tony Martinez: a detective in the Santa Cruz Police
Sylvia Konig: worked with Deborah Spencer
Ray Molinaro: worked with Deborah Spencer
Matthew Crocker: works at Keffenheim Laboratories
Max: works for Matthew Crocker