

The University Murders

Aim

- To stimulate students to read the book.

1 Tell students that *The University Murders* is a murder mystery story set in Scotland. In the story, the police are carrying out an investigation to find out who the murderer is. Have a general discussion about any other police investigation stories or programmes they are familiar with (e.g. in the United Kingdom, there is *The Bill*). Ask students what they expect from a police murder investigation story – e.g. a body (or more than one), interviews with suspects, a police doctor looking carefully at the body for useful information, clues and red herrings, perhaps a car chase, etc.). Teach any unfamiliar vocabulary, e.g. *suspect* – someone who might be guilty of a crime, *clue* – something that might help the police discover what happened and who the murderer might be, *red herring* – something that looks like a clue but isn't really; something that might send the police in the wrong direction.

2 Tell students that the most important character in *The University Murders* is Inspector Jenny Logan, who is leading the murder investigation. Ask them to read Extract 1. Working in pairs or small groups, ask students to write two lists – one about what the extract tells them about Calton Hill and the view from Calton Hill, and one about what the extract tells them about Inspector Jenny Logan.

Suggested answers: List 1 – Calton Hill goes up behind the old Royal High School; it has cars parked on it; there is a view from the hill of Nelson Monument and the City Observatory; and there is a dead body on the hill. List 2 – Jenny Logan has strong opinions; she loves the city she lives in; she notices and enjoys views.

3 Ask students to read Extract 2, which shows Inspector Jenny Logan having a bad start to her morning. Ask them to rewrite it, making Logan's morning even worse than in the extract. When they have finished, put students into small groups and ask them to read out what they have written to each other. Now, ask them to say (vote for) which morning is the worst out of their group (tell them they cannot choose their own). The worst mornings from all the groups should now be read out for the class to vote for which is the worst morning of all.

4 Ask students to look at Extract 3, which is a list of all the characters in the book. Now ask them to choose five of the characters, including Inspector Jenny Logan (so Logan and four more characters). Now ask them to choose one of their five characters to be a murderer, and another to be a victim (teach *victim* if necessary – someone who has been murdered). Now ask them to read Extract 4, and to think of an idea for a murder story starting with this extract and using all their five characters. Tell them to make some notes and then, when they are ready, put them into pairs and ask them to share their ideas with their partners.

5 Ask students to read Extract 5, in which inspectors Logan and Grant ask Kenneth Henderson questions as part of their murder investigation. Now ask students to say whether they think Kenneth Henderson is a murderer or not. Now ask the students who think he *is* a murderer to sit together in a group, and the students who think he *isn't* a murderer to sit in another group. Ask them to talk about why they think as they do – what is it in the extract that makes them think this way? They should write their thoughts down in a list, and when they have finished, both groups should read their lists out. Has anybody changed his/her feelings about Henderson now? (i.e. if at first they thought he *wasn't* a murderer, do they now think he *is* a murderer now?)

6 Now tell students to imagine that Henderson *is* a murderer (NB: tell them that they are doing this for this exercise and that you aren't telling them that he is actually a murderer in the book – you don't want to give the story away). Ask them to rewrite the extract (or part of it) as if they are Henderson (i.e. in the first person). They should remember that they are a murderer as they write, and show us what Henderson is thinking and feeling as Logan and Grant ask him questions.

7 If there are enough copies of *The University Murders* to go round, give them to students and ask them to start reading.

Optional Extras

8 Creative writing activity: ask students to write the story they thought of for Activity 4.

9 Drama activity: divide students into groups of three, and ask them to act out the scene in Extract 5, where Logan and Grant are questioning Henderson. They will need to decide before they begin whether they think Henderson is a murderer or not, as this may affect the acting. They should also spend five minutes talking about how each of the characters is feeling, e.g. do they think Logan likes Henderson? How does Grant, an older man, feel about having a young, female boss, etc.

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Extract 1

The road to the top of Calton Hill goes up behind the old Royal High School, a beautiful building that in Logan's opinion should have been used to house the new Scottish government. Instead, millions of pounds had been wasted on a new building. About halfway up the hill Logan pulled her car over to the side of the road behind two police cars and an old blue Volvo. She recognised Helen Robertson, the police doctor, among a group of police officers near a wall some metres below the level of the road. As she got out of her car, Logan turned and looked up towards the Nelson Monument and the City Observatory. She thought that the view from the top of Calton Hill was one of the best over the city – well, it was when there wasn't a dead body on the side of the hill.

Extract 2

Monday morning started badly for Logan and soon got worse. Her kettle broke while she was making breakfast so she couldn't make a cup of tea. She then found she had set her video recorder wrongly and it had not recorded a programme that she wanted to watch. Things soon got much worse. When she arrived at the London Road police station, she was told that Frances Stewart had been found dead near Craigmillar Park Golf Course.

Extract 3

Inspector Jenny Logan: a police officer in Edinburgh.

Sergeant Grant: an officer helping Inspector Logan.

Sergeant Graham: another officer helping Inspector Logan.

Billy Marr: a man who lives in Edinburgh.

Helen Robertson: a police doctor.

Clare Rutherford: a research student.

Katie Jardine: a research student.

Frances (Fran) Stewart: a research assistant.

Karen Ramsay: a researcher who works at the university.

Mrs Dalwhinnie: owns Fran's flat.

Dr David Balfour: a research supervisor.

Kenneth Henderson: a research supervisor.

Tam MacDonald: a journalist.

Extract 4

A team of officers spent the weekend answering calls. Although Grant and Logan investigated the more interesting ones they got no further in finding the murderer. Then on Sunday evening there was another disappearance.

Extract 5

'Kenneth Henderson?' asked Logan.

'Yes ...' said Henderson. 'Inspector Logan and Sergeant Grant,' said Logan. 'We'd like to ask you a few questions.'

'Sure. Of course! Come in!' said Henderson.

Logan and Grant walked through a large square hall into a bright room with a light wooden floor. The furniture was all light wood too, with bright blue and yellow covers on the chairs and the sofa. Logan noticed a photograph lying on one of the tables. It was of Henderson with an attractive young woman. They had their arms round each other and were laughing. Henderson waved towards the chairs.

'Sit down,' he said, sitting down in an armchair himself and looking at Logan. 'What's this all about?'

'I understand you had a party last night,' said Logan.

'Yes,' said Henderson. 'Oh! I hope the neighbours haven't been complaining about the noise again.'

'Not that I know of,' said Logan. 'But a young girl who came to the party hasn't been home since. Fran Stewart.'

'Fran!' said Henderson. 'Yes, she was here. She left fairly early, as I remember – about one o'clock. I happened to notice what the time was when she came to say goodbye. But nobody else left until about four in the morning.'

Henderson seemed quite relaxed.

'Did you know Clare Rutherford?' asked Logan suddenly.

'Oh God!' Henderson sat forward. 'You don't think ... the same thing has happened to Fran?'

'We're keeping an open mind,' said Logan, watching him carefully, 'but we're giving it our full attention.'

'Well, yes. I can understand that,' replied Henderson, getting comfortable in the armchair again.

'So,' repeated Logan, 'did you know Clare Rutherford?'

'Well, sure. I knew who she was. But we never had anything to do with each other, professionally ... or privately,' said Henderson, giving Logan a big smile.

'Who else was at your party?' asked Logan.

'People from the university,' said Henderson. 'Students, teachers.'

'David Balfour?' asked Grant.

'Yes, David was here for a time,' Henderson smiled again. 'But he's not really a party animal. He probably left early.'

'What do you mean, probably?' asked Grant.

Henderson looked at Grant. Grant was sixty with thick black hair and a large black moustache. His clothes, as always, looked rather old: a blue jacket and grey trousers. He did not look much of a party animal either.

'Well, I don't check when my guests arrive and leave,' said Henderson. 'And some people just leave when they want to go home. They don't come and say goodbye. Anyway, sometimes I can be difficult to find.' Again he looked at Logan, raised his eyebrows and gave her a big smile. 'I sometimes end up in the bedroom.'