

# This Time it's Personal

## Aim

- To stimulate students to read the book.

**NB:** Do not give extract sheets out at this stage.

1 Tell students that *This Time it's Personal* is categorised as a 'thriller'. Ask students what thriller stories they are familiar with (e.g. *The Usual Suspects*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Rear Window*, *China Town*, *Jurassic Park*, *The Da Vinci Code*, etc.). Write these up on the whiteboard. Now divide students into small groups and ask them to write a definition of a thriller together. Ask groups to report back to the whole class with their definitions and try to reach a consensus about the 'best' definition.

**Suggested definition:** Thrillers are characterised by fast, frequent action, and resourceful heroes or heroines who must put a stop to the plans of more-powerful and better-equipped villains.

2 Tell students that thrillers often use suspense, red herrings, and cliffhangers, and teach these terms if necessary. (Definitions could be as follows: *suspense* – awaiting an outcome with excitement or anxiety; *red herring* – a misleading clue; something that diverts attention from what's really happening; *cliffhanger* – a chapter or a scene that ends in a suspenseful way in order to maintain excitement and to encourage readers/viewers to read/watch on.) Now discuss how and where these devices are used in the thrillers previously identified.

3 Tell students that *This Time it's Personal* is narrated by Nat Marley, a New York private investigator. Working in their small groups (or in different small groups), ask students to discuss what they think Nat Marley might be like. Feedback to the whole class. (Discussions might bring out things such as: wears a raincoat, helps beautiful women in distress, has a gun in his office drawer, etc.) Now give out the extract sheets and ask students to read Extract 1. How different is Nat Marley's description of himself from their own guesses?

4 Draw students' attention to the fact that *This Time it's Personal* is written in the first person, from Nat Marley's point of view. Ask them to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this (e.g. we feel involved as we see everything through Nat's eyes, but we can't see anything that he doesn't see, etc.). Ask students to try to rewrite Extract 1 in the third person. Which works best in their view? The first person or the third person?

5 Tell students that in *This Time it's Personal*, Nat Marley is trying to clear his assistant Stella's brother of murder. Now ask students to read Extract 2, which is where we first meet Stella. In pairs, ask students to discuss what they have learned about Stella from this extract. Now ask them to write a paragraph in the first person from Stella's viewpoint. They should try to show what sort of person they think Stella is and how she is feeling at this moment in time. (Tell them they can include dialogue if they wish.)

**Suggested answers:** Stella is tough, determined, caring, emotional, etc.

Now ask students to read out what they have written to their partner. Their partner should give some feedback about whether they feel the writing successfully shows us Stella's personality and feelings.

6 Students will now have the chance to play at being private investigators. Ask them to work in pairs, and tell one of each pair that they are 'A's, and the other that they are 'B's. Now ask the 'A's to read Extract 3, which is an account of what has happened to Tchernov, an illegal immigrant to the USA. They should read the extract several times and make some notes about how they think Tchernov was feeling while all these things were happening. Meanwhile, tell the 'B's that they will be a private investigator, interrogating an illegal immigrant (asking him questions). Tell them to think of questions they could ask (e.g. How long have you been in this country? Who helped you to get here? etc.). When both 'A's and 'B's are ready, 'B's should interrogate 'A's. 'A's can invent answers if the answers are not already in the extract.

7 Now tell the pairs that the 'A's are going to take a turn at being the private investigator, interrogating the 'B's. Ask the 'B's to read Extract 4, which is a statement made by a captured crew member of a ship, which had been carrying illegal immigrants, and was then found wrecked. Ask 'B's to make notes about how he might have been feeling when this was happening, and ask the 'A's to think of questions to ask (e.g. How many illegal immigrants were on board? etc.).

8 Ask students to read Extract 4 again. Remind them that this is a statement from one of the captured crew to the police. Now ask them to choose a section of the extract (e.g. when the crew were watching the immigrants in the lifeboat during the storm) and ask them to do a piece of creative writing to bring this scene to life. They should show what is happening and how people are feeling, etc. It might be useful for them to decide whose point of view they are telling the story from – e.g. the captain, a crew member or one of the men in the lifeboat. When they have finished, ask for volunteers to read their pieces of writing to the whole group.

9 Ask students to read Extract 5, which is a description of a fairground ride. Working in small groups, students should then try to invent a new fairground ride. If the group has several ideas, they should vote on which is best then give it a name and write a description of it. One member of each group should then describe their fairground ride to the whole class, and the class should vote for the one they like the best. (Groups should not be allowed to vote for their own ride.)

10 If there are enough copies of *This Time it's Personal* to go round, give students a copy and ask them to start reading.

### Optional Extra

11 Divide the class into teams (two or four, depending on the number of students). Give both teams five minutes to think of as many words as they can from the words BRIGHTON BEACH. The winner is the team with the most words.

# This Time it's Personal

---

## Extract 1

The name's Marley, Nat Marley, licensed private investigator. My prediction is that you already have a mental image of my type of work. I can safely bet that your image comes straight from the fantasy world of Hollywood. That's a long way from the truth. The majority of my work is dull. Often just pure routine stuff like divorce, bad debts, or missing persons. Don't imagine for a moment that I'm good-looking either. Just an ordinary-looking guy, bald, overweight and on the wrong side of forty. And let's get another thing straight, my working days seldom start with a wealthy, attractive female client anxiously waiting for my professional services.

## Extract 2

You've heard the expression 'on the wrong side of the tracks', meaning the poor, underprivileged areas of the inner city? That's where Stella grew up, in the Barrio on the Upper East Side, known as Spanish Harlem. She had left school early and got into plenty of trouble as a kid. Then it took years of night school study to catch up on her education.

As she put down the phone, I asked, 'How are things on this beautiful spring morning?'

Silence. She just gave me a blank stare. The morning mail was on her desk, unopened. Something was definitely wrong. 'Stella, what's the matter? Come on, out with it.'

She looked up at me tearfully. 'Nat, I don't know what to do. It's family – my kid brother, José. I've just been talking to him on the phone. He's been arrested. He could be in serious trouble.'

## Extract 3

'I can tell you all about Zernov. Three years ago, I was living in Minsk, back in the old country. It was a hard life. There were ten of us living in a little apartment in one of the old Soviet buildings on the outskirts of the city. I'd always dreamed of a new life in the U.S.A. But it was difficult to emigrate legally. There's a limited number of visas available. I heard some gossip around that there were other means of entering the country. What you needed was three thousand U.S. dollars. A man called Nick visited regularly, made all the arrangements, and promised that jobs would be waiting for us.

Tchernov continued with more details of the operation: 'Provided you had the money, no questions were asked. I finally met him. Exactly as I had imagined – well-dressed, successful. He told me stories about the U.S.A., the land of opportunity where any man could realize his ambition – as long as you had the dollars. I worked every hour I could, I borrowed, and, I'm ashamed to say, I stole. I didn't care how I got that cash.'

## Extract 4

We were carrying ten Russian immigrants. The captain stopped about a kilometer off shore, and the men were loaded onto the lifeboat. We had complained to the captain about the condition of the lifeboat. The captain ignored the complaints.

A signal was received from shore. Then the lifeboat set off towards the light. When it had covered about half the distance, the weather changed rapidly. A storm blew up. We could see that the boat was in trouble. They couldn't seem to control it. I guess the motor had broken down. Then we lost sight of it. I begged the captain to move in and pick up any survivors. Eventually he agreed, but by the time we reached the area, there was nothing to be seen. We were now in danger of being driven onto the shore ourselves, so we had to leave and head out to sea.

It was then that we started to have engine trouble. The captain tried to steer away from the Long Island shore, but the engine was gradually losing power. Day after day, we tried to fix the engine, but nothing worked. Eventually, a combination of wind and currents started to push the ship back towards the coast. When the next storm blew up, the motor finally failed completely. We were helpless. Also, we didn't have a lifeboat to escape in. Our boat was finally wrecked on Jones Beach, and the crew members were arrested by the Coast Guard.

## Extract 5

The amusement parks, dominated by the huge roller coaster rides soon came into view. One of those rides which had terrified and delighted me as a child was still operating – the Cyclone. I still remember the way the train of little cars would climb up the track to the highest point, then dive and shake down what felt like a series of near-vertical drops.