

But Was it Murder?

Aims

- To focus students' attention on aspects of murder mystery genre.
- To stimulate students to read the book.

1 Tell students they are going to read a murder mystery set in London. Brainstorm what the class know about London. One way of doing this is to give pairs or small groups a few minutes to think of five things they know about London. Then take feedback and write ideas on the board or overhead.

Possible answers: capital of England, UK, the Thames, Big Ben, etc.

If you have a map of London, perhaps from the internet, you can ask students to find places mentioned in the story: New Cross, Blackheath, Greenwich.

2 Ask students if they think there is a lot of murder in London. (Probably, it's a large city, etc.) What words are associated with murder? Elicit some of these words, by writing the following on the board:

v _ _ _ _ _
s _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ death
s _ _ _ _ _
g _ _
k _ _ _ _
m _ _ _ _ _ e

Answers: victim, suspicious death, suspect, gun, knife, motive

Optional extra: Put students in pairs or groups of three. They have five minutes to come up with a story that includes all the words. Ask two or three pairs to tell their story to the class.

3 Focus on 'motive' and elicit possible motives for murder (e.g. money, love, jealousy, hatred). Ask students to read the Blurb (on handout opposite). Are there any possible motives in this short description of the victim?

Answer: Perhaps jealousy because of all the things he had.

4 Put students in groups of four to discuss the following questions:

- What happens in a murder mystery?
- What types of characters are there?
- What is the detective usually like?
- Do you have a favourite detective in literature or on TV?

Each group has a reporter who reports back to the class.

Possible answers: a and b. In murder mysteries there is usually a *suspicious death* either at the beginning of the story or near to it. There is also a detective who is put on the case. Many murder mysteries have a small number of characters, many of whom could have a *motive* for murdering the *victim*. Murder mysteries are sometimes called 'whodunnits'.

c and d. During feedback build up a picture of a typical detective on the board. Elicit examples from literature, films or TV (e.g. Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot). Establish that the detective is often, though not always, a loner or even an outsider. S/he is very clever, tends to get hunches (or feelings) about things and is sometimes eccentric.

5 Ask students to read the list of characters opposite. What does it tell us about Detective Inspector Rod Eliot, the detective in this book?

Possible answers: He's the boss (detective inspector); he's married; he has a son.

6 Ask students to read the first three extracts (see handout). What more do we find out about Rod Eliot? In what ways is he a typical detective?

Possible answers:

He gets angry sometimes – perhaps he's moody...

He likes to go to the pub.

He has nightmares about his work.

He worries a lot about his wife and son – loves them very much.

He trusts his own feelings in his work.

He is able to 'switch off' when he's with his family.

Discuss with students which of these characteristics are typical of fictional detectives. This is a matter of opinion, but probably the moodiness and the hunches or feelings are pretty typical.

7 Focus on the character list again. Which ones might be suspects? Make a list on the board.

Answer: Mr and Mrs Crowther, Amanda Grant, Philip Wilver, Lisa Wilver, Mrs Brook, Linda Scott.

Put the students in groups and ask them to imagine possible motives for each character (e.g. Linda Scott the manager of his shop hated him because he treated her badly, didn't pay her well, etc.).

Take feedback. This is intended as a fun activity, and the motives can be as bizarre as the students like.

8 Ask the students if they want to know 'whodunnit'? If you have the books, hand them out and start reading.

But Was it Murder?

Blurb

Alex Forley had everything: good looks, money, a beautiful house in London, an attractive girlfriend and a close group of friends. But now he is dead and Detective Inspector Rod Eliot wants the answers to two simple questions. Was it murder? And if so, who was the murderer?

Characters

Detective Inspector Rod Eliot
Detective Constable Jamie Bowen
Police Constable Drewitt

} Policemen at
New Cross police
station, London

Sally Eliot: Rod Eliot's wife

Micky Eliot: Rod Eliot's son

Alex Forley: owner of an antique furniture shop

Mr and Mrs Crowther: Forley's neighbours

Amanda Grant: Forley's girlfriend

Philip Wilver: Forley's doctor

Lisa Wilver: his wife

Mrs Brook: a cleaner

Linda Scott: manager of Forley's antique shop

Extract 1

'Sorry to disturb you, sir,' said Detective Constable Jamie Bowen. 'But we've got a bit of a problem.'

'So have I,' said Eliot. 'I shouldn't be here. Ask Inspector Merryon.'

'Sorry, sir,' said Bowen, 'but Inspector Merryon hasn't arrived yet. He phoned to say his car is stuck in a traffic jam in Hackney. He probably won't be here for at least half an hour.'

Eliot hit the top of his desk angrily. The lights from The Queen's Head looked so inviting. But in the street below people were crowded into shop doorways, trying to escape from the rain. The water poured onto the street and was thrown up again by the lines of cars moving slowly away from the centre of London.

'All right, Bowen,' he said. 'You'd better tell me about it then. What is it?'

'We've just had a report of a death, sir. And there's a gun.'

This was the last thing Eliot wanted to hear. He had been in a bad mood all day.

Extract 2

Normally, Eliot went to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow, waking up after exactly eight hours, feeling fresh and lively. But tonight he kept turning from side to side, unable to relax. And when sleep finally came, it gave him no peace.

He dreamed he saw Micky and Sally [his son and wife] in the back of a stolen Mercedes. A gun lay on the seat in front, next to the driver. Eliot watched in fear as the man went faster and faster. He shouted at him to stop. Suddenly the man turned round without slowing the car, and Eliot saw only blood instead of a face. Eliot woke up covered in sweat.

Extract 3

As soon as he sat down at the kitchen table, he relaxed. Forley's death was a problem which interested him, but did not worry him any more. Forley had had no children or family of his own. Of course, his friends would miss him, but they had their own lives . . . He hoped the pathologist would say it was suicide, and that would be the end of it.

But Eliot's feelings told him it was more complicated than suicide. And after eighteen years with the police, he trusted his feelings. He knew that two people were lying, and maybe more. What were they trying to protect?

Still, it could all wait until tomorrow. Now it was time for him to listen to Micky. He smiled as his son began to tell him about last night's firework show.