

Deadly Harvest

Aim

- To stimulate students to read the book.

- 1 Tell students that the title of the book is *Deadly Harvest*. Do not show them the book at this stage. Ask them to discuss in pairs what the 'deadly harvest' of the title might be and to write their idea onto a post-it note or small piece of paper. Students should then report back to the whole class. Next, ask students to organise all the notes so that similar ideas are grouped together into themes (e.g. if one pair said they thought the deadly harvest was poisoned wheat and another pair thought it was about wheat changed by scientists in an experiment, these themes would be placed close to each other).
- 2 If it is available, pass round a copy of the book and ask students to look at the picture on the cover. Have their ideas on what the 'deadly harvest' is changed now?
- 3 Tell students that *Deadly Harvest* is a murder mystery story. Ask students for examples of murder mystery stories or films (e.g. Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile* or *Murder on the Orient Express*, etc.). Write these up on the board and choose one or two examples familiar to most students to discuss what usually happens in these stories (e.g. there is a murder and a detective questions people to try to find out the murderer's identity; sometimes there is another murder before the detective finds out 'whodunnit').
- 4 Ask students to read Contents (on handout opposite), which is a list of the chapter headings from *Deadly Harvest*. Working in small groups, ask students to discuss and make notes about what they think happens in each chapter. Report back to the whole class and discuss the similarities and differences in the ideas from the different groups. Next ask students to go back to their groups to discuss whether they think any of the title headings could be improved. If they think they could, ask them to think of alternative headings. Report back to the whole class. Finally, ask students what they think the 'astonishing evil' referred to in the title heading for Chapter 19 might be.
- 5 Ask students to read Extract 1, which is a description of the book's main character, Detective Chief Inspector Jane Honeywell. Ask students to make notes about what they learn about Jane Honeywell. Next, ask them to discuss *how* they have found out these facts (we see Jane through the eyes of a police constable at the reception desk). Ask them whether they think this is a good way of finding out what Jane looks like, then ask them if they can think of any other ways the reader could have been given this information (e.g. Jane might have been getting ready for work and thinking about her appearance while she looks in the mirror to brush her hair).
- 6 Ask students to read Extract 2, which shows us what Jane Honeywell is like at work. Working in pairs, ask students to list some adjectives that describe what Jane is like as a boss.
Suggested answers: confident, firm, blunt, decisive, experienced, etc.
Share these with the whole class.
- 7 Now ask students to read Extract 3, which shows us Jane Honeywell looking at the view out of the window of her flat. Ask students whether they think this view of Jane is different to the one shown us in Extract 2, and if so, how. Tell students to write down what they think Jane might be thinking as she looks out at the view – they should write these thoughts in the first person, as if they are Jane. Next, ask them to share these with a partner. More confident students might want to share what they have written with the whole class.
- 8 Ask students to read Extract 4, which is an account of a dream that Jane Honeywell has. Working in pairs, ask students to discuss what they think the dream means. Report back to the whole class and discuss the similarities and differences between their ideas. Ask students whether they think the dream tells them anything new about Jane Honeywell. If there is time, you might also like to invite students to share any interesting dreams they have had and invite the class to interpret them.
- 9 Ask students to read Extract 5, which is from the beginning of the book. Working in small groups, ask students what questions the extract makes them want to ask.
Suggested answers: Who is the woman? Who is the person with the face black as thunder? What has the woman found out that she wants to go to the police about? What does she do with the axe? What happens next? etc.
- 10 Tell students to continue writing where Extract 5 finishes, then ask them to share what they have written with a partner.
- 11 If there are enough copies of *Deadly Harvest* to go round, give one to each student and tell them to start reading.
Optional extra: Tell students that Chief Inspector Jane Honeywell has a cat called Julian (you might also want to ask them whether they think this is a good name for a cat). Divide the class into two teams. Give each team a piece of paper and ask them to use it to list the names of their pets on one side and the type of pet it is on the other (if they do not have a pet, they can write down a relative or friend's pet). When both teams are ready, they should take it in turns to read a pet's name out. The other team has to guess the type of animal it is, and get a point for a correct answer. The team with the most points wins. If you want to liven this game up further, you could allow students to include invented names for invented pets.

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Extract 1

'Good morning, madam, can I help you?' said the police constable at the reception desk, looking at Jane carefully. Who was this woman? He did not remember having seen her before. She was tall and her face was pretty with short dark hair neatly cut. The sharp lines of her dark suit, together with the white silk blouse and low-heeled black shoes, gave her a businesslike appearance. Was she a lawyer, new to the area, come to visit one of the bad boys arrested in the night for stealing a car? The policeman guessed, accurately, that she was in her early thirties.

Extract 2

'OK, Pete,' she had said. 'Come in and shut the door.' Standing in front of her desk, she had noticed that she was as tall as he was.

'All these stolen cars,' she had begun, looking him straight in the eyes. 'We really should do something about them.'

'I think we're doing all we can, ma'am,' Pete Fish replied. He stopped talking in his American accent and yawned slightly.

'I'm afraid I don't agree, Pete,' Jane told him bluntly. 'Let's see. What do you usually do? You find someone who you know has committed one of the crimes. Then you persuade him to admit that he has done another fifteen similar jobs. Which is fine. It makes life easy for everyone. But then how do you explain the fact that the rate of these crimes is increasing?'

Extract 3

It was early spring and the sun was pouring through the window of a small flat on the first floor of an elegant three-storey house. Out of the window a pair of swans could be seen flying over the river which passed through the west-country market town of Pilton. A woman, Jane Honeywell, stood at the window watching the swans' flight, dressed in her night-clothes. A few days ago, from her flat in the middle of Manchester, she had seen the sun rise between the rows of smoke-blackened redbrick houses, up into the polluted city sky. Here the sunlight was dancing on the water and the air was clean.

Extract 4

That night Jane slept badly. Once she woke, sweating, and realised she had been dreaming. She had been running and running, through fields and streams, climbing over gates and hedges. On a road a motorist stopped and she got into the car. It was Pete. 'Are you all right?' he asked. 'No,' she answered, 'I have to get away from the swans.' She looked out of the back window and saw, following the car, a small black cloud which seemed to be getting larger and larger as it caught up with them. The cloud turned out to be a swarm of bees. She woke up when bees started appearing inside the car.

Extract 5

'Ah!' she cried and sat down on the wet grass, breathing heavily. The sudden, sharp pain had been so surprising that she couldn't imagine what had caused it. Then she saw, attached still to the back of her hand, a bee delivering its poison into her skin. Horrified, she knocked it away and watched the redness and swelling begin while the pain intensified . . .

She heard footsteps, rubber boots kicking small stones from the path so that they rolled down the hill. Looking up, she saw the face, black as thunder.

'Hey, you! Push off!'

From deep within her came a strange, bitter laugh that she couldn't control. 'I know what's going on,' she said, breathing heavily. 'I'm going to the police.'

Her fingers found the handle of something, an axe, leaning against the wall. She picked it up.