

Murder Maker

Aims

- To introduce students to some creative writing techniques and to give them the opportunity to practise using them.
- To stimulate students to read the book.

1 Ask students to read Extract 1 on the next page. What do they notice about the way it is written? (It is written in the first person/has a narrator.) Ask students to speculate about the narrator. What sex is the narrator? (female) What age? (35) Who is she talking to? (ex-boyfriend) How is she feeling? (angry, full of hate, hurt) Ask students to discuss how these feelings might affect the story she is telling.

Suggested answer: She is biased, and we are only likely to hear her side of the story, so she might not be a reliable narrator.

2 Put students into pairs and ask them to read the first two sentences of Extract 1 again. Do they agree with the narrator (Carla) that murderers can be *made* (by life experiences and disappointments) or do they think, as Carla used to, that murderers are born that way? Pairs report back to the whole class.

3 Ask students which authors they like to read. Why do they like their books?

Example answers: They may identify with a character, enjoy the fast-paced plot, like the setting of the book, etc.

Do any of these books belong to a particular genre (romance, thriller, murder mystery, science fiction, comedy, etc.)? Write these up on the board.

4 Put students into small groups and ask them to suggest an ideal location for each genre (for romance, an ideal location might be Paris). Groups report back to the whole class. Then ask students to think about what genre their home town or their current place of residence might suit. Tell the students that *Murder Maker* is a thriller partly set in Cuba and that the setting plays an important role. If some students said in Activity 3 that the setting of a novel was important to them, ask them to say why this is so. If not, ask students to think of novels where the setting is important.

5 Tell students that we say that a book has a 'sense of place' if the setting is vividly portrayed. Ask students to read Extract 2. Do they feel the extract has a sense of place? If yes, which images, adjectives and verbs contribute to this?

Suggested answers: images – lovers kissing in dark passages, men drinking rum and smoking cigars; adjectives – 'once-grand', 'humid'; verbs – music 'drifts', Cadillacs 'sail'.

If no, how could it be changed to make it more vivid?

6 Ask students for descriptive language (images, adjectives and verbs) which give an impression of what it is like to be in a nearby park, building or tourist attraction. Write

some of these on the board. Next, ask students to talk to a partner about a place they have been which made an impression on them. They must try to portray this place as vividly as possible. Their partner can help by asking questions. Next, ask students to write about the place, choosing adjectives which really convey what it feels like to be there. They can use dictionaries if necessary. Ask them to share their completed pieces of writing with their partner. Did they write as vividly about the place as they spoke about it?

7 Tell students to read Extracts 3, 4, 5 and 6. Tell them that these extracts are about the three men that Carla, the narrator, murders in the book. Ask them to read Extracts 3 and 4 again – about Carla's first victim, Alec Cartwright. Ask them for their first impressions of Alec, then explain to them that sometimes authors *tell* us what a character is like, and sometimes they *show* us. 'He was tired' is *telling* us about how a character feels, while 'He rubbed his eyes and yawned' is *showing* us how he feels. Ask students to discuss Extracts 3 and 4 with a partner. Do they *show* or *tell* us about Alec? (Extract 3 tells us, and Extract 4 shows us through a combination of direct speech and description of action.) Which technique gives us the most vivid picture of what Alec Cartwright is like as a person? Here you might want to return to the topic of prejudice/bias as previously discussed in Activity 1.

Ask students what they think a 'man-to-man kind of voice' is like. Can any of them reproduce it? What would a girl-to-girl or woman-to-woman voice be like?

8 Tell students that Extract 5 *tells* us about Terry. Ask students to imagine a scene, situation or moment that would *show* Terry's character to the reader. What is he saying or thinking? If he is speaking, what kind of voice does he have?

9 Extract 6 *shows* us what Pete is like. Ask students to rewrite the extract so that it *tells* us what he is like. Students can then divide into small groups to read out their work for feedback.

10 Ask students to read Extract 1 again. Point out that the reader knows from the beginning of the book that Carla is a serial killer. Discuss whether they think this might spoil the story for them or not. Ask what the students think of Carla. Can they sympathise with her?

11 Tell students that although Carla is narrating the whole story to her ex-boyfriend Mark throughout *Murder Maker*, we never hear any description of him. Ask students to make notes about him – physical description, lifestyle, job, hopes and dreams, etc. Then divide students into small groups to compare their notes.

12 Ask students to imagine that Mark finds Carla's notebook and reads what she has written. (Extract 1). What would Mark's reaction be? Ask them to write a letter to Carla from Mark.

Murder Maker

Extract 1

I used to think that murderers were born murderers, but now I know differently. Now I know they can be made.

In my case, it was shock that did it. Four brutal words that changed my life forever. And who spoke those words?

You.

Congratulations, you created a murderer.

But even though I've killed three people, I'm not to blame. You are. Because you betrayed me. And the sad thing is, there's still a part of me that can't believe you did it. Still a part of me that loves you...

But don't worry, I'll deal with that. I won't allow a little emotion like love to stop me from killing you.

Extract 2

The real Havana is a city of whispers and echoes. You'd love it, you really would. Lovers kiss in dark passages while music drifts in the humid winds. Paint peels from the front of once-grand buildings and men sit in doorways smoking cigars and drinking rum. And of course there are all the wonderful old cars left over from the days when Hollywood stars visited the city in the 1950s before the Revolution. Cadillac cars sail along the streets, curiosities from another time, polluting the atmosphere as they go. Money that could be spent on clothes or food is spent on cars by people with nowhere to go and nothing to do. Havana is a city populated by people waiting for something to happen.

And, as I walked along the dark streets of Habana Vieja, carrying the spirit of you inside me, many of the people sitting in doorways decided that I might be what they were waiting for. An opportunity.

They used the traditional Cuban way to attract my attention: by making a sound that isn't quite a whistle or a shout, but a strange hiss like a water bird on a lake. And some of the younger men found the energy to get up from their steps to follow me, bringing the smell of cigars and rum along with them.

Extract 3

About Alec Cartwright

Luis pulled an expressive face. 'Alec Cartwright is fat and his clothes are too small,' he said, his face full of disgust. 'His big white belly hangs over his trousers, and his neck is purple and tired like the neck of a turkey. The man is ugly. Ugly.' He almost spat the word at me across the table. 'But worst of all,' he went on, 'are his eyes. Alec Cartwright has small, suspicious eyes, and he never looks into your face when he speaks to you.'

Extract 4

What Alec Cartwright says

'Women!' he said calmly, in a man-to-man kind of voice. 'They always make the mistake of thinking they can't be replaced when, in actual fact, the very reverse is the case.' He looked down at the letter again, speaking to it as if it were Gina. 'My dear,' he said, 'your departure is an inconvenience, I assure you, and not the tragedy you so fondly seem to imagine it is.' And then he laughed.

Extract 5

About Terry

I hated Terry because of how he had just treated his horse and of course how he had treated Gemma, and yet I was still extremely aware of his attractiveness. Because he *was* attractive. Oh, he was middle-aged with an over-large stomach and hair going a little thin on top, but he possessed the self-confidence of someone who's been attractive all his life. Someone who's used to having women falling at his feet.

Extract 6

About Pete

Little Ben was chatting away to me, describing a boat trip he and his father had gone on the previous day, and his strawberry ice cream was melting right down the front of his T-shirt. His hands were pink and so was his mouth. There were even pink spots on the blanket next to him.

'Do you think my son's turning into an ice cream?' Pete asked me, and Ben laughed with delight.

'Don't be silly, Daddy!' he said.

'Or perhaps,' said Pete, 'he's turning into an ice cream monster...'

Ben approved of this idea, and he leapt up, holding his ice cream out in front of him like a weapon. 'Yes, Daddy, I'm an ice cream monster!' he cried excitedly, and for the next few minutes he proceeded to chase his father around the garden.