

# A Death in Oxford

## Aims

- To introduce students to the characters in the story.
- To introduce the main events in the story.

1 Tell students that the story is called *A Death in Oxford* and ask them what kind of story they think it is (murder mystery). Ask them to call out what they know about Oxford.

**Possible answer:** famous university town an hour north-west of London; lots of beautiful old buildings; popular place for punting on the rivers.

2 Tell students that Inspector Frank Williams and Sergeant Kate Miller are investigating a murder. Ask them to read Extract 1 and answer the following questions: Who is dead (teach 'victim')? Where is the body? What is the murder weapon?

**Answers:** Dr Janet Leighton; at her house in St John Street; a knife.

What reason (teach 'motive') does Sergeant Miller give for her murder?

**Answer:** He thinks someone wanted money or things to sell, because the computer has gone and there are things everywhere in the room.

Ask them who else is in the room with Williams and Miller and why.

**Answer:** a police scientist; to take photographs and find evidence (teach 'evidence') for the murder.

3 Tell students that the police go to talk to four different people about the murder. First they visit Dr Barbara Collins. Ask them to read Extracts 2 and tell you why Barbara Collins will be a suspect (teach 'suspect').

**Possible answer:** The report in the *Oxford Post* explains the clinic's difficult financial situation and reveals that Dr Collins is one of the doctors who will be losing their job; the police might therefore suspect that Dr Collins is angry/upset and possibly want to murder Leighton.

Ask students what else they learn about Dr Collins and Dr Leighton which confirms that the police are right to make her a suspect.

**Answers:** Dr Collins is angry with Dr Leighton because she told the local newspaper she was losing her job before telling her; she also thinks that Dr Leighton is jealous of her because she writes for the newspaper; she tells Dr Leighton that she hates her.

4 Tell students that the day before the murder, Dr Leighton visited her lawyer. Ask them to read Extract 3. Ask the students which person they go to talk to next and what her job is.

**Answer:** Elizabeth Morgan, a lawyer.

Ask them what they find out from her.

**Answer:** Dr Leighton is changing her will so that her husband and son get no money when she dies; all the money goes to a charity for Africa.

Ask them whom they think the police will want to talk to next.

**Answer:** husband and Dr Leighton's son.

5 Ask students to read Extracts 4. Ask them what the husband and son want from Dr Leighton and what her response is.

**Answer:** money; she's not going to give them any.

Ask them how the two men feel about this.

**Answer:** angry; Chris says he doesn't love his mother.

6 Ask students to work in pairs and think about the four people the police talk to. Ask them to make a list, with the names of the people on the left and the reason for talking to them on the right. Ask them to decide which ones the police think are suspects, and write the motive for murder next to their names. Call back suggestions from the whole class and note them on the board.

**Possible answers:** Dr Barbara Collins – loses her job at the clinic – says she hates Dr Leighton – might want to kill her; Elizabeth Morgan – lawyer – they visit her to find out about Dr Leighton's will – no reason to kill her; Simon Leighton – husband – wants his part of the money now he and his wife don't live together – Janet Leighton refuses to give him any – very angry; Chris Leighton – son – wants money to buy a car – Janet refuses – also tells him that she's changing her will so he and his father get no money – he says he doesn't love her.

7 Ask the students in pairs to decide who they think murders Janet Leighton

8 Ask students to read the extracts again and write a paragraph describing what kind of person they think Janet Leighton is and why.

**Answers:** open, but it will probably be negative from what they find in the extracts; however, her decision to leave all her money to charity may also be seen as something positive.

# A Death in Oxford

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## Extract 1

At six forty-five Williams walks into the front room of a tall house on St John Street. He stops. There are books and papers everywhere, and a body next to the coffee table.

Sergeant Kate Miller is by the window. She's waiting for him. There's a police scientist in the room too.

'What's all this?' asks Williams.

'Someone wanting money or things to sell, I think,' says Miller. 'This is Dr Leighton's computer table – but there's no computer. And there's her bag . . . And there's this.' In her hand is a bag, and in the bag is a knife.

## Extracts 2

The day before the murder.

**a** From the newspaper:

'The clinic is having a bad time, but we're not closing,' says Dr Leighton. 'Clinics are expensive and we always need money. This year we are asking some of our doctors to leave.' One of these doctors is Dr Barbara Collins. Oxford people know Dr Collins well. She answers their questions every week in the *Oxford Post*. 'We're sorry Dr Collins is leaving,' says Dr Leighton, but we need doctors at our clinic, not writers.'

**b** Barbara Collins face is red. 'What's all this?' she asks angrily. 'You take away my job and you tell the *Oxford Post* first, not me.'

'Barbara, Barbara,' says Janet Leighton . . . 'You know that the clinic needs money. And you're expensive.'

'It's not the money, is it?' says Barbara. 'I write for the *Oxford Post* and you don't like that . . . There can't be two famous people at the Leighton Clinic, can there? The can only be one. You.'

Janet says nothing.

'I hate you,' says Barbara.

## Extract 3

The day before the murder.

Elizabeth Morgan and Janet Leighton are in a room at Morgan and Freebody Lawyers on Worcester Street . . .

'You want to talk to me about your will?' asks Elizabeth.

'Yes,' says Janet. 'I want to change my will. I don't want to leave any of my money to my son or my husband . . . I want it all to go to HALO – the Help Africa Live Organisation. They put money and doctors into Africa . . . And I want to see my new will on Monday morning.'

## Extracts 4

The day before the murder.

**a** It's six thirty in the evening. Janet Leighton opens the front door of her house. Her husband, Simon, is there.

'What do you want?' asks Janet.

'I want my money. I don't live with you now, but I am your husband. You've got all our money and our house,' says Simon.

'I can't,' she says. 'I don't have it. It's all in the clinic.'

'OK, Janet,' says Simon. 'I'm going to see my lawyer.'

Janet laughs. 'Go then, she says. 'See your lawyer. But you're not going to get any money from me.'

Simon Leighton says nothing. His eyes are dark. He turns and walks away.

**b** It's eight thirty in the evening and Chris Leighton is at his mother's house.

Chris looks at his mother and smiles. 'I want to buy a car, Mum. Can I have £500?'

Janet looks at her son. Her eyes are cold.

'Not from me,' she says. 'I always help you with money, but now I'm stopping' . . .

'I'm changing my will,' says Janet. 'I'm not going to leave anything to you or your father' . . .

'How can you leave me nothing?' he asks. 'It's because you don't love me. Well, that's OK. I don't love you.'

And he walks quickly out of the room.