

The Penang File

Aims

- To introduce students to the story and setting.
- To look at aspects of the spy thriller genre.

1 Tell students that they're going to find out about a story called *The Penang File*. Ask them if they understand the title. If necessary, give them a brief explanation of the word 'file'. You could refer them to similar examples from other books/films they might have read/seen (e.g. *The Ipcress File*). Ask them if they know where Penang is.

Answers: A 'file' in this sense is a set of documents about a government/MI5 operation; Penang is in north-west Malaysia.

2 Ask if anyone has been to Penang – or other places in Malaysia – and if so, get him/her to tell the rest of the class about it. If not, ask students to suggest what they think it might be like there. Show them a map if you have one. Write their ideas on the board (e.g. palm trees, sandy beaches, hot humid weather, temples, colonial buildings, markets, tropical fruit, hot spicy food).

Ask them to read Extracts 1 and compare what they find there to what has been written on the board.

3 Ask students to look at the People in the Story list. Ask them what kind of story they think this is, and what the different characters might be going to do.

Answers: a spy thriller; then students' own answers, but you might expect the following: Sergio is going to kill somebody in Penang. His friend the Big Man is going to help him. Naylor sends Munro to Penang to stop him. The Malaysian policemen are going to help Munro.

4 Ask students to read Extract 2 and find out why Penang is important in the story. Ask them what they think Sergio wants to do and why.

Answer: It's the 50th anniversary of Malaysia's independence from Britain and the English Prince is meeting the King of Malaysia to celebrate. Sergio wants to kill the prince. The reason: open.

5 Tell students that Munro is a British secret agent. Ask them to work in pairs and make a list of the sorts of things secret agents do, and what happens to them (you might ask them to think about James Bond as an example). Call back their suggestions and make a class list on the board.

Possible answers: chase, catch and kill bad people; follow orders from their boss; drive fast cars; look for information and clues; get caught by the bad people and escape; go to exotic and dangerous places; meet beautiful women.

6 Ask students to read Extracts 3 and find out what things Munro does. Are any of Munro's activities the same as/similar to those listed on the board?

7 Ask students to work in pairs to review what they know about the story. Ask them what they think is going to happen. They can then tell another pair. Call back some suggestions from the whole class.

8 Ask students to work in pairs to invent a new job for Munro. Ask them to decide where in the world it takes place, what happens and what Munro does. Ask them to give it a similar name: "The File".

The Penang File

Extracts 1

- Munro leaves the hotel. It's three o'clock in the afternoon and very hot. There's a trishaw outside the hotel.
- It's five minutes to the Padang – a big green park by the sea. There are some big white buildings next to it . . .
- 'That building is the Dewan Bandaran, the City Hall,' says the driver. 'It's very beautiful.'
- In the old city people are selling things in the street: clothes, CDs, vegetables, everything. There's a lot of noise. And music: Chinese music, Indian music, Malay music.
- Sergio and the big man walk to the Hotel Royale. It's a tall hotel with a restaurant at the top. You can see all of the city from the restaurant.

People in the Story

Munro: a British agent

Naylor: Munro's boss

Sergio: a killer

Inspector Abdullah: a Malaysian policeman

Inspector Lee: a Malaysian policeman

Sergeant Ramasamy: a Malaysian policeman

The Big Man: a friend of Sergio

Extract 2

'No,' says Naylor. 'August 31st is an important day in Malaysia. And this year it is *very* important.'

'Of course.' Munro looks at the newspaper on Naylor's desk . . . 'The country is fifty years old. And the English Prince is going to meet the King of Malaysia on August 31st.'

Extracts 3

- 'Good,' says Naylor. 'You're going to Penang. Tonight.'
- '*Your* job,' says Naylor, 'is to find Sergio and stop him.'
- At six o'clock Munro is in a car near Sergio's hotel. The car says 'Taxi' on it, but it's a police car.
- At six thirty Sergio and the Big Man come out of their hotel. They walk along the street. Munro gets out of the car and walks behind them.
- Munro watches the gun. He knows he can't get to it. He turns.
'Is this it?' he thinks. 'Am I going to die?'
Then everything goes dark.
- Munro runs along Lebuhr Farquhar. People stop and look. No-one runs in the street in Malaysia.
- Munro runs back up the stairs. He stops at Room 1415. He opens the door slowly. Across the room the window is open. Sergio is at the window, a gun in his hands.