

The Amsterdam Connection

Aims

- To stimulate students to read the book.
- To introduce key vocabulary from the book.
- To develop the skill of listening for specific information.

1 Ask students to look at a picture of Amsterdam depicting a typical scene. (If you can't find a suitable one, use the picture on the front of the book.) In pairs or small groups give students a few minutes to think of five things they know about Amsterdam.

Suggestions: in Europe, in Holland (or the Netherlands), has canals, tulips, liberal (free), people speak Dutch, people ride bicycles (bikes), tall houses

Alternative: If you have access to lots of pictures of Amsterdam (e.g. from the internet), divide the class into groups, each with a picture of a different aspect of the city. Groups brainstorm what their picture tells them about Amsterdam. Each group then shares with the whole class.

2 Tell students that they are going to read a murder mystery set in Amsterdam. Elicit further examples of murder mysteries by getting students to brainstorm in groups.

Focus questions:

- What happens in a murder mystery?
- What types of character are there?
- What is the main character usually like? (detective, policeman/woman)

During feedback, build up a picture of a typical detective on the board. Elicit examples from literature, e.g. Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot.

3 Ask students to read the Blurb (next page). Refer back to the typical detective that they have built up in stage 2. Is the main character like the one they have described? Elicit that Kate is a woman reporter. Ask students which sport is involved (football). So, the story is about a woman reporter entering the world of football. Ask students what kind of problems she might have. Ask students to read the Extract (next page). Ask what else they find out about Kate (she has karate skills).

4 Ask students to quickly read the Chapter Headings (next page).

Focus questions:

- Which two Dutch cities does the story involve?
- Name one football position mentioned (there are two).
- Which restaurant name is mentioned?
- Which season does the story take place in?

Answers: Amsterdam and Rotterdam, goalkeeper or striker, Sluizer's, spring

5 Ask students what they know about football. Elicit some facts. Are any of the girls football fans? Would they read a book about football? Ask students to look at the Vocabulary Extracts from the book (next page) and complete the sentences with single words. The words are all items of vocabulary taken from football.

Answers: a manager, b score, c kick, d referee, e striker, f goalkeeper

Two alternatives:

- Make it into a competitive paired activity by sitting pairs back to back and giving partner A the extracts and partner B the words. The winning pair is the one to complete the task fastest.
 - Ask groups to brainstorm football words and collect all the words on the board. Then give out the extracts and see if they can complete them.
- 6 Tell students that they are going to listen to the first chapter of *The Amsterdam Connection*. It's about a meeting between two characters, Kate and Max, in a pub. Give students the following set of questions on a handout or on the board. After listening, they are going to answer the questions.
- Where was Max born?
 - What's the name of the pub where Kate and Max have a beer?
 - What's Max's job now?
 - How did Kate and Max originally meet?
 - What does he ask Kate to do?
 - How does Kate react to this suggestion?
 - What arrangement do they make before Max leaves?
 - How does the chapter end?

Play the cassette if you have it. Alternatively, read students the first chapter. Ask them to listen and find the answers to the questions. Get students to compare their answers in pairs or small groups. Check answers as a whole group.

Answers: a in Holland, b the Queen's Head, c he helps his brother, the owner and manager of a football team, d he was her boss (editor) on the *Manchester Evening News*, e to go to Holland to write a story about his club, f she says she's not a sports writer – she writes about crime, g Max said he would ring her (in a few days), h Max is found dead in an Amsterdam street.

An alternative: If your students are fairly good at listening, you can ask them to listen twice to the chapter, and, working in groups of three, write eight 'wh'-questions. They must know the answers to their questions! They then challenge another group with their questions.

- Ask students what they think is going to happen next. Do they think the book is really about football or is it a murder mystery? How do they think the two themes will come together?
- Hand out the books. The students should now be ready to read on!

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Blurb

Reporter Kate Jensen travels to Amsterdam when a friend is found dead there. Her search for the murderer takes her to parts of the city that tourists never see, and to a man prepared to kill to hide the truth. Kate soon discovers that football can be a very dangerous game.

Chapter Headings

- Chapter 1 At the pub
- Chapter 2 The past
- Chapter 3 Amsterdam spring
- Chapter 4 Talk with a striker
- Chapter 5 Dinner at Sluizer's
- Chapter 6 Bert's story
- Chapter 7 Rotterdam
- Chapter 8 Life gets interesting
- Chapter 9 The Amsterdam Connection
- Chapter 10 A policeman
- Chapter 11 A football match
- Chapter 12 A goalkeeper
- Chapter 13 A plan
- Chapter 14 Prisoner
- Chapter 15 Stories
- Chapter 16 Goodbye Amsterdam

Extract

I walked slowly down Keizersgracht, staring at the pavement, thinking about everything that had happened during the day. I walked down by the canal.

Suddenly a car stopped in the street next to me. A dark shape jumped out, came up behind me and pulled my arm behind my back. It hurt like hell. 'Get in the car and don't make a noise, or I'll break your arm,' the guy said. I didn't recognise the voice.

I raised my foot and kicked the guy hard in his right leg. At the same time I pulled back my free arm and put my elbow into his chest. My attacker wasn't expecting this and it worked well, taking his breath away.

The guy let go and I turned round quickly. I looked up and saw a tall dark-haired man with clear blue eyes.

'Come here,' he said. He pulled me, trying to get me into the car.

'Hey, say please,' I said, fighting back. He was smiling, almost making fun of me. That made me really mad. He was quite strong, and much bigger than me, but my years of karate training had made me fast. I also knew how to surprise him.

He managed to pull me nearer to the car. I stepped back on my left foot, pulled up my right leg quickly and gave him a karate kick in the stomach, with my right foot. I put all my weight behind the kick and it surprised him. He was tall, but if you hit the stomach, size doesn't matter. He started to fall over like a tree and, as he fell, I hit him on the side of his head with my elbow. The elbow is the hardest bone in the body and in no time he was on his knees, holding his head between his hands. He realised then that it was not going to be as easy as he had thought. He hadn't expected me to put up such a fight. He quickly climbed back into his car looking around nervously. He was probably afraid that the noise would bring people out to see what was happening.

Vocabulary Extracts

- a Max's brother, Tom, was the owner and of Rotterdam City Football Club and the Carson Football School. (page 7)
- b As I looked out of the window at the Dutch countryside, I thought about what I'd read last night about Rotterdam's match against Leiden. I didn't know much about football, but I knew you had to goals to win. (page 36)
- c Tom had the body of a sportsman. He had played for Ajax when he was younger, and he still looked like he could a ball around a field. (page 37)
- d We went into the crowded stadium and found our seats . . . There were probably fifty thousand people . . . Less than a minute after we'd sat down, the blew his whistle and the match started. (page 54)
- e Jos van Essen was a great footballer, like Pelé, Cruyff or Shearer. A real star. He had played for Holland many times as a and always scored lots of goals. (page 19)
- f Rotterdam played well in the first half of the match and got the first goal. The Barcelona went towards the ball . . . but couldn't reach it. At half time the score was 1–0 to Rotterdam. (page 54)

Chapter 1 At the pub

'You need a holiday, Kate,' said Max Carson. It was early evening and we were having a beer in the Queen's Head. 'A break from London,' he added.

'Oh sure, Max.' I smiled. 'Go and tell Balzano. I'm sure he'll agree with you.'

Dave Balzano was an excellent newspaper editor, but he was often angry with his reporters. In fact, he was famous for his bad temper. The thought of Balzano giving me a holiday because I needed one was funny. I said this to Max.

'So Dave hasn't changed then?' asked Max, laughing. Max knew Dave – and me – from some years ago when we all worked on the *Manchester Evening News*. Max was the editor and Dave was head of foreign news. Max gave me my first job. I was just a young reporter then, trying to make a name for myself. That was before I came to London.

'Er . . . no,' I said. 'He certainly hasn't.' I smiled and drank some of my beer. 'But tell me about you,' I added.

I hadn't seen much of Max for a while, mainly because he lived in Holland now. He had been born there. His mother was Dutch, his father was English. He came to England when he was in his early twenties to train as a journalist and he stayed. But Max retired from the *Evening News* five years ago when he was fifty-five, and returned to Holland.

'I'm fine,' said Max.

'And the club?' I asked.

Max's brother, Tom, was the owner and manager of Rotterdam City Football Club and the Carson Football School. When Max left the *Manchester Evening News* he had joined his brother, to help him with his business. Max now had about twenty-five per cent of the shares and a nice income for his 'retirement'.

'It's OK,' said Max.

'Only OK?' I asked, surprised.

'Mmm . . . yes,' said Max. I got the feeling that he didn't want to talk about it, so we changed the subject.

Max didn't often come to England these days, except to see

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friends and to look for new players for Rotterdam City Football Club. When he did come to London he would come to the *Echo's* offices to see me and we usually had a beer at the Queen's Head. It was a typical central London pub, full of office workers with mobile phones. It was smoky and noisy at this time of the evening, but the beer was good.

'So what's happening here in London, Kate?' Max asked. Max always asked me about my latest story; he liked to know what was happening. He still loved the newspaper business. He and Balzano were complete opposites, and not just because Balzano's father was Italian and Max's mother was Dutch. Balzano was a very good editor, but you never knew when he was going to explode. Max, though, was calm and easy to work with – he was one of the best.

I told him about my last story and the reason I was so exhausted. 'You just need a break,' Max said again.

Max was right, I did need a holiday. Life in the city had been really tough for the past few months. I had had some difficult murder stories, the usual zero information from the London police and Balzano pushing me as usual. I was beginning to feel tired and the idea of getting away from London was a very attractive one.

'You like Holland, don't you?' asked Max suddenly.

I laughed. 'Well, yes, but . . .' I'd been to Amsterdam once, chasing a story, and I'd loved it.

'And you know something about sport,' he added.

'Well, I know about karate and a bit about boxing,' I said. 'I don't know that much about other sports.' I had trained in karate for ten years and my father had been a boxer when he was young.

I looked at Max, waiting for the rest.

'Listen,' he said, 'why don't you come and write a story about our club in Holland?'

Rotterdam City Football Club was one of the top clubs in Europe now. Many of the young men who had been trained at the school – the Carson Football School – played for Rotterdam City. The club took kids who could play football off the streets and trained them to be the best. Football schools like theirs were one reason why Holland had so many great footballers. It was perfect: the school and the club.

Max had always been crazy about football. When he was editor of the *Evening News* he spent all his free time watching football matches. He even took me to see Manchester United once. He was one of those guys who knew the name of every footballer in Europe.

'What me?' I laughed. 'A sports reporter? You know me, Max, I only write about crime.'

Max smiled. 'I know, Kate, and you're great. But it would be a holiday for you!'

Max looked at his watch and finished his beer quickly. He had arranged to have dinner with a friend that evening and he had to leave immediately. He was already late. He got up, promising that he would ring me in a few days.

But Max never rang. In fact, I never saw him again. Two days later, he was found lying dead in an Amsterdam street with twenty knife wounds in his body.