

Teacher's notes

K's First Case

by L. G. Alexander



SUMMARY

Sir Michael Gray, a wealthy businessman, dies violently in a locked room. There is blood and water on his shirt and a whisky glass on the floor near his hand.

Everybody in the large country house at the time is a suspect, from Sir Michael's wife through his gold-digging secretary, Angela, to the housekeeper.

For Inspector Katrina Kirby, otherwise known as K, it is her first case. She methodically questions all the suspects and then sets a trap for the murderer. Colonel Fawcett falls into the trap, but only apparently because, as an engineer, he is curious to see the mechanism that killed a man whilst the man was alone. The real murderer is listening at the door. It transpires that Mrs. Flack, the housekeeper wanted to kill Angela Everett, Sir Michael's secretary because she thought Angela was a bad woman. She used one of her beloved boss's own mechanisms to fire an icicle into the heart of the first person who opened the freezer compartment, believing it would be Angela. Unfortunately, it was Sir Michael himself, and he was killed. K's first case is solved. There will surely be many more.

ABOUT L. G. ALEXANDER

Louis Alexander was born in London in 1932. He studied at London University and graduated in 1954. He taught English as a Foreign Language in a number of different countries.

He is best known as the writer of some of the best-selling English language courses such as *New Concept English* (1967), *Look, Listen and Learn* (1971), *Follow Me* (1980) and *Direct English* (1993–1998); practice books such as *For and Against* (1968) and grammars such as the *Longman English Grammar* (1988).

Louis Alexander lives in London with his wife, Julia.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

K's First Case brings together two ingredients which have recurred time and again in whodunnits – the country house and the locked room.

The story is a classic 'whodunnit' (who has done it). This name is commonly applied to mysteries in which the identity of the criminal is kept secret until the very end. But many whodunnits are, like this one, also whydunnits and howdunnits (how was it done), since we do not know the motive or even the means by which the murderer effected the crime.

Many of the murder mysteries of that most famous whodunnit writer, Agatha Christie, took place in country houses. The large house offers atmosphere and a contained environment. It enables the author to bring together a disparate group of people who could have a variety of motives for the murder. We can be told which room each of the suspects was in at the time of the murder and we can check on each suspect's story with another. There can, of course, be many red herrings – clues which point to a person who is, in fact, entirely innocent. Finally, the country house setting provides the opportunity for the classic denouement, when the great detective brings together all the suspects and reveals, piece by the piece, the crime and how he, or she, solved it. In this story, as in so many others of the genre, the butler – actually the housekeeper – did it.

K's First Case is also an excellent example of the puzzle story. How could the man die violently in a locked room? One of the first murder mysteries, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, by Edgar Allan Poe, posed a similar problem and most crime writers have tried their hand at the locked room mystery at least once in their career. Time shift – so that the murder happened before the door was locked, arrows through upper floor windows and electrified door knobs have all been used in the past, but in this story the writer adds an extra touch – the disappearing weapon, melting away as the other country house guests were beating on the door.

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INTERMEDIATE

K'S FIRST CASE



Teacher's notes

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Ask students to work in groups and discuss the following questions:

- 1 Do you like murder mysteries? Why?/Why not?
- 2 Why do some people like murder mysteries?
- 3 Who is your favourite detective? Why do you like him/her?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Pages 1–8

- 1 Ask students to work in pairs.

Student A

 - (a) Look at the plan of the rooms on page 5 for one minute. Then close your book and try to draw the plan. Show it to Student A for checking.
 - (b) Test Student B on the things in the study (picture on page 6).

Student B

 - (a) Look at the picture on page 6 for 1 minute. Be prepared to answer questions about the picture from Student A.
 - (b) Look at Student A's plan of the rooms (page 5). If there are any mistakes, explain them – but don't show him/her the picture!

Pages 9–29

- 1 Ask students to work in pairs.

Student A

You are K. Give your boss your ideas on pages 9, 10 and 11.

Student B

You are K's boss. Tell her the problems with each of her ideas.
- 2 Ask students to work in groups to discuss these questions:
 - (a) How does Kay start each interview?
 - (b) Why does she start each interview in this way?

Pages 30–59

Ask students to work in groups. Do the activities on pages 41 and 42. Which is the best reason for the murder for each person. Then check your ideas with K's notes (page 43)

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Ask students to work in groups. They must work out exactly why K. asked every person about whisky and ice. Elicit the ideas and decide which group has the best explanation.

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Pages 1–8

- army** (n) the part of a country's military force that is trained to fight on land
- colonel** (n) an officer with a high rank in the army
- dictaphone** (n) a device for recording your voice, often used by a boss to leave messages, letters, etc. for a secretary
- carpet** (n) a heavy woollen material for covering a floor
- engineer** (n) someone who designs the way roads, bridges, machines, etc are built
- fingerprint** (n) the mark made by the pattern of lines at the end of someone's finger
- housekeeper** (n) someone whose job is to do the cooking, cleaning, etc, in a house or hotel
- poison** (n) a substance that can kill or harm you if you eat it, drink it etc.
- whisky** (n) a strong, alcoholic drink made from grain and produced especially in Scotland

Pages 9–29

- gamble** (v) to try to win money by playing cards, etc.
- ice-tray** (n) a tray which is filled with water and put in a freezer to turn the water into ice
- inspector** (n) a police officer of middle rank
- jealous** (adj) feeling angry or unhappy because someone else has something that you want
- will** (n) a legal document in which you say who you want to give your money and property to after you die

Pages 30–59

- bow** (n) a weapon used for shooting arrows
- icicle** (n) a thin pointed piece of ice that hangs down
- mechanism** (n) the part of a machine that does a particular job
- string** (n) a thin rope made of several strands twisted together



Student's activities

Photocopiable

Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only exercises are marked.

Activities before reading the book

- What are the three questions that any detective must answer after a crime. Discuss in groups?
- Read the first part of the Introduction and check your answers.

Activities while reading the book

Pages 1-8

- Make the correct names of the characters in the story.

(a) Sir	(i) Cavell
(b) Lady	(ii) Everett
(c) Colonel	(iii) Elizabeth
(d) Angela	(iv) Fawcett
(e) Andrew	(v) Flack
(f) Nancy	(vi) Kirby
(g) Katrina	(vii) Michael
- Match each person from Exercise 1 with a description.
 - A detective.
 - Lady Elizabeth's brother.
 - Sir Michael's friend.
 - Sir Michael's secretary.
 - Sir Michael's wife.
 - The Gray's housekeeper.
 - The rich boss of Cavell and Company.
- Put these events from pages 3 and 4 in order.
 - A police doctor looked at the body.
 - Kay arrived at Sir Michael's house with the police.
 - Lady Elizabeth called the police.
 - Mrs Flack knocked on the door of Sir Michael's study.
 - Mrs Flack took some coffee to Sir Michael's study.
 - Sir Michael didn't answer the door.
 - Sir Michael died.
 - Sir Michael drank some whisky.
 - Sir Michael had dinner.
 - Sir Michael locked the door and the window.
 - Sir Michael went into his study.
 - The police took photographs of the study and the body.
 - The police took the body away.
 - They broke down the door and went in.

H's First Case



- They saw Sir Michael's body on the floor.
 - Three other people knocked on the door and shouted.
- 4 Complete each of the sentences about the information on page 7. Use a word or phrase from the box in each case.

blood and water
 door and window
 fingerprints
 knife or a gun
 whisky
 secret doors or secret ways

- There was a ... glass next to Sir Michael's right hand.
- There was ... on Sir Michael's shirt and on the carpet.
- The ... were locked from the inside.
- There weren't any other ... only Sir Michael's.
- There wasn't a
- There aren't any ... into the room.

Pages 9-40

- Work in pairs. How much can you remember from pages 12 and 13?
 - What did Sir Michael do on the evening of the murder?
 - Which of the actions in (a) does he always do?
 - He arrived home at 7.00.
 - He arrived home with his secretary.
 - He went to his room for a bath at 7.05.
 - He changed for dinner.
 - He had a drink with his wife in the library.
 - He had dinner at 8.00.
- Who gives Kay each piece of information (pages 14 to 40). Tick one or more people in each case. Nancy Flack, Lady Elizabeth, Remember! Kay talks to Mrs. Flack twice
 Key:
 MF = Nancy Flack
 LE = Lady Elizabeth
 CF = Colonel Fawcett
 AE = Angela Everett
 AC = Andrew Cavell

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PRE-INTERMEDIATE

H'S FIRST CASE



Student's activities

	M	L	C	A	A
	F	E	F	E	C
(a) Lady Elizabeth Michael had a fight in the library after dinner.	✓				
(b) Angela Everett didn't go to Sir Michael's study that evening.					
(c) Angela Everett was in the garden					
(d) Sir Michael liked other women.					
(e) Lady Elizabeth went to the living room to speak to her brother, Andrew					
(f) Angela Everett is a bad person.					
(g) Colonel Fawcett and Sir Michael were very good friends.					
(h) Sir Michael lent Colonel Fawcett £50.					
(i) Sir Michael and Colonel Fawcett had a fight about money.					
(j) Colonel Fawcett went to the library to read.					
(k) Sir Michael loved Lady Everett.					
(l) Lady Elizabeth hated Sir Michael.					
(m) Sir Michael left Angela Everett £100,000 in his will.					
(n) Andrew Cavell didn't like Sir Michael.					
(o) Sir Michael and Andrew Cavell had a talk before dinner.					
(p) Lady Elizabeth loved Sir Michael.					

Pages 41–59

1 Work in pairs. Answer these questions about the information on pages 44 to 47.

- Which question does K answer in the study at 1.30?
- How did X murder Sir Michael?

2 On page 48 Kay does not know who murdered Sir Michael. But she can think of a reason for each person. Match the person, the reason and their reply to K. One person does not reply.

Person

- Lady Elizabeth
- Colonel Fawcett
- Angela Everett
- Andrew Cavell
- Mrs. Flack

K's reason

- He changed his will and perhaps he left you £100,000.
- He lent you money. You gambled it on horses and lost it. He wanted it back.
- You read his letters. You wanted to punish him.
- You were jealous of Sir Michael's secretaries. You hate Angela Everett and you want to punish your husband.

- You were worried about the £100,000. You wanted to save the company. Sir Michael spent money on women and you didn't like it.

The reply

- (No answer)
- He was my friend.
- I did it. You think that, don't you policewoman? Well, I didn't!
- I loved him.
- Oh, miss, I didn't, miss, really I didn't. I didn't do it.

3 Complete these sentences from the information on pages 50–52. Use words from the box.

arms bed chair door fndge house light man mechanism morning noise police room shape study wall watch

- K. looked at her ...
- 'We must all go to ... ,' she said.
- 'I can't leave this ...
- 'You can't leave. There are ... all around.'
- 'I don't want to stay in this ...
- They all left the.. and went upstairs.
- At three o'clock in the K went downstairs quietly.
- She sat in Sir Michael's ... and waited.
- Suddenly, she heard a
- The ... opened very quietly.
- K saw a ... in the dark.
- It was the shape of a
- The person went to the
- He pulled it from the
- Then he pulled out the
- K jumped on the man and held his
- K turned on the ... and saw Colonel Fawcett.

4 Work in pairs. Make sure you both understand how the mechanism worked.

5 Answer these questions from pages 55–58.

- Who was listening outside the door.
- Whose bow was it?
- Who killed Sir Michael?
- Who did she want to kill?
- Why did she want to kill that person?

Activities after reading the book

Work in pairs. Write the plot of the story in one paragraph.



