

THIS UNIT INCLUDES

Vocabulary ■ gossip and secrets ■ giving and withholding information ■ colloquial omissions
 ■ literal and figurative language ■ vague language
Grammar ■ passive structures ■ the causative ■ participle phrases
Speaking ■ talking about gossip and secrets ■ talking about spy stories ■ talking about conspiracy theories ■ drawing conclusions
Writing ■ an opinion essay

Secrets 9

9A

VOCABULARY AND LISTENING Gossip

I can understand and use the language of news and gossip.

- 1 **SPEAKING** Work in pairs. Describe what the people in the photos are doing. Why do you think they might be doing it? How might you explain their expressions? Use the words below to help you.

confide (in somebody) drop a bombshell
 eavesdrop (on a conversation) gossip (n & v) indiscreet
 outraged rumours scandal scandalised scandalous

- 2 **3.07** Listen to three people gossiping over the phone. Complete each sentence with the information you hear, using up to four words.

- Kate tells Gerry that Harry has got _____.
- She urges Gerry not to tell anyone because Harry hasn't yet _____.
- She claims only to have told Gerry the secret because he is _____.
- Brian tells Jake about secret plans to _____.
- He suspects that some of the people involved in the deal will _____.
- Julia tells Karen about two friends who started a relationship at a _____.
- She reveals that Sue is very keen to keep the relationship secret from her _____.
- She expects the secret will eventually come out when the couple _____.

- 3 **3.07** Choose the correct word in these expressions. Then listen again and check.

- Have you heard the **latest** / **newest**?
- I'm telling you this in the **firmest** / **strictest** confidence.
- If **word** / **truth** gets out, it'll cause...
- Harry's the **heart** / **soul** of discretion.
- He hasn't **breathed** / **whispered** a word to anybody.
- I know it won't go any **longer** / **further**.
- I managed to **glean** / **clean** some information.
- It's **fully** / **highly** confidential at the moment.
- Don't **quote** / **repeat** me on this, but...
- I've got some really **fruity** / **juicy** gossip for you.
- It's all very **hush-hush** / **hush up**.
- They won't be able to keep it under **hats** / **wraps** for ever.



- 4 Rewrite these sentences using expressions from exercise 3. More than one answer may be possible.

- Don't tell anyone who you heard this from, but I think my brother is getting married.
- I discovered a few interesting tidbits about her private life, but I won't tell a soul. My lips are sealed!
- Her plans for next year are top secret.
- For the time being, they're withholding the identity of their new manager.
- I'll tell you my secret because I know you aren't a gossip.
- She told me one really fascinating secret about Tony. If it ever becomes common knowledge, he'll be furious!

- 5 **SPEAKING** Work in pairs. Discuss the questions. Then compare your ideas with the class.

- What kinds of topic often form the basis of gossip?
- Why are so many people interested in gossip?
- In what ways could gossip be damaging?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages of being friends with a gossip?

»»» VOCABULARY BUILDER 9.1: GIVING AND WITHHOLDING INFORMATION: WORKBOOK PAGE 111 «««

1 **SPEAKING** Have you ever failed to keep a secret? If so, what were the consequences?

2 Complete the text with the verbs below.

betray boost crop drop fall feign get give
go hold prise turn

How to keep a secret

- Just don't tell anyone! Avoid the subject as much as you can. Should it ¹ _____ up in conversation for whatever reason, ² _____ ignorance.
- Never ³ _____ hints in company that you know a secret but can't say what it is. This is like a red rag to a bull. The people you are with will try to ⁴ _____ the information out of you and you probably won't be able to ⁵ _____ out.
- If you feel yourself weakening, ⁶ _____ your motivation by focusing on why it's so important to keep the information secret. Is it to avoid ruining a surprise? Or to protect a friend's reputation?
- Whenever you're tempted to ⁷ _____ a friend's secret, remind yourself of the long-term damage that this could do to your friendship. At the same time, tell yourself that being trustworthy is a wonderful trait to have.
- Don't ⁸ _____ into the trap of thinking you can tell just one other person provided you insist that it should ⁹ _____ no further – it always does! And sooner or later, your lack of discretion will ¹⁰ _____ back to your friend.
- If you know you're bad at keeping secrets, don't encourage people to share them with you – or at least ¹¹ _____ them some warning of your track record!

WARNING! Sometimes it is better to pass on a secret, if you suspect the person who told you may be in trouble. A secret can ¹² _____ out to be a cry for help.

3 **SPEAKING** Work in pairs. Decide whether you agree or disagree with the advice in exercise 2. Can you add any more advice?

LOOK OUT!

It's often more natural to use a phrase (verb + noun) instead of a single-word verb, especially in informal language.

talk → have a talk decide → make a decision

4 Read the **Look out!** box. Then rewrite the sentences using phrases instead of the underlined verbs.

- I'd love to shop with you this afternoon, but I need to revise.
- Think about what I've said and call me later.
- I've concluded that what I really need is to rest.
- I looked at her painting and complimented her.
- I hinted that I'd like to be paid, but I didn't want to offend by asking.

LEARN THIS!

Colloquial omissions

In informal, spoken English, we often omit unstressed words at the beginning of the sentence (pronouns, articles, etc.) provided the meaning is clear. For example:

Can't talk now! (I can't talk now.)

Speak later. (We'll speak later.)

Need a lift? (Do you need a lift?)

A negative form is sometimes replaced by **not**.

Not a cloud in the sky. (There isn't a cloud in the sky.)

GRAMMAR BUILDER 9.1: COLLOQUIAL OMISSIONS: PAGE 128

5 Read the information in the **Learn this!** box. Then cross out any words in the dialogue that you think could be omitted in normal, colloquial speech. (You may have to make other minor changes as a result.)

- Sam Are you on your way home?
Colin No. I'm just hanging around.
Sam Do you fancy a coffee?
Colin Sure.
Sam It's my turn to pay.
Colin Thanks. So, how are you?
Sam I'm good. How are you?
Colin I can't grumble. Have you heard any good gossip recently?
Sam I have, as it happens.
Colin Well, go on then. Spill the beans!
Sam Well, apparently Ben and Molly have split up.
Colin You're kidding! Really?
Sam But they haven't told people yet. So don't say a word to anyone!
Colin I understand.
Sam Do you promise?
Colin Yes!
Sam OK. Would you like another coffee?
Colin No, thanks. I'd better make a move.
Sam OK. I'll see you later.
Colin Sure. It was nice talking to you.



6 **3.08** Listen to the dialogue and compare what you hear with your answer to exercise 5.

7 **SPEAKING** Work in pairs. Role-play a dialogue using the outline below. Include some colloquial omissions.

- A: You meet your old friend B in a café and start chatting. B asks about a mutual friend, and you hint that you know a secret. You are unwilling to share it at first, but B persuades you. You make B promise that it won't go any further.
B: You meet A in a café and start chatting. You ask about a mutual friend, and A seems to know a secret about that friend but is unwilling to share it. You persuade A to let on.

1 SPEAKING Work in pairs. How much do you know about the writer Joseph Conrad? Can you name:

- 1 the country he was born in?
- 2 the country he adopted as his home?
- 3 any of his works?

2 **3.09** Listen to the information about Conrad. Find the answers to question 1.

3 **3.09** Listen again. Are the sentences true (T) or false (F), or is the answer not stated (NS)?

- 1 The themes of Conrad's works are very relevant to the problems of the modern world.
- 2 Conrad lived in London and later in a village.
- 3 Special postage stamps were issued to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Conrad's birth.
- 4 Conrad's friends never really regarded him as English.
- 5 Conrad's contemporaries accused him of racism.

4 Read the opening to the novel *The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad. How does it convey the fact that Mr Verloc is a secret agent of some kind? Is it:

- a by describing the shadowy characters who frequent his shop?
- b by mentioning the political propaganda displayed in his shop window?
- c by implying that the shop is a front for some other clandestine activity?

5 Read the *Reading tip*. Then find these phrases in the extract. What exactly do they imply? Choose a or b.

- 1 *nominally in charge of his brother-in-law*
 - a His brother-in-law was the one who really ran the shop.
 - b His brother-in-law was incapable of running the shop.
- 2 *his ostensible business*
 - a The shop was not his real business.
 - b He was ashamed that the shop was his business.
- 3 *a square box of a place*
 - a The shop was an attractive building.
 - b The shop was an ugly building.
- 4 *for the sake of the customers*
 - a His customers were ashamed to be seen there.
 - b His customers were really spies.
- 5 *who hung about the window for a time*
 - a The young men had nothing else to do.
 - b The young men needed time to summon up courage.
- 6 *with impudent virulence*
 - a The customers disliked the loud bell.
 - b The customers rang the bell loudly on purpose.

READING TIP

Literary texts often imply information without explicitly stating it. To get the most out of a text, you should be sensitive to this. Certain phrases can convey information indirectly, as can the repeated use of similar words.

6 Does the text imply that Mr Verloc's life is glamorous or not very glamorous? Find several adjectives in the text to support your answer.

- 1 Mr Verloc, going out in the morning, left his shop nominally in charge of his brother-in-law. It could be done, because there was very little business at any time, and practically none at all before
- 5 the evening. Mr Verloc cared but little about his ostensible business. And, moreover, his wife was in charge of his brother-in-law.

The shop was small, and so was the house.

- 10 It was one of those grimy brick houses which existed in large quantities before the era of reconstruction dawned upon London. The shop was a square box of a place, with the front glazed in small panes. In the daytime the door remained closed; in the evening it stood discreetly but suspiciously ajar.

- 15 The window contained photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls; nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy, and marked two-and-six in heavy black figures; a few numbers of ancient French comic publications hung across a string as if to dry; a dingy blue china bowl, a casket of black wood, bottles of marking ink and rubber stamps; a few books, with titles hinting at impropriety; a few
- 20 apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like *The Torch*, *The Gong* - rousing titles. And the two gas jets inside the panes were always turned low, either for economy's sake or for the sake of the customers.

- 25 These customers were either very young men, who hung about the window for a time before slipping in suddenly; or men of a more mature age, but looking generally as if they were not in funds. Some of that last kind had the collars of their overcoats turned right up to their moustaches, and traces of mud on the bottom of their nether garments, which had the appearance of being much worn and not very valuable. And the legs inside them did not, as
- 30 a general rule, seem of much account either. With their hands plunged deep in the side pockets of their coats, they dodged in sideways, one shoulder first, as if afraid to start the bell going.

- 35 The bell, hung on the door by means of a curved ribbon of steel, was difficult to circumvent. It was hopelessly cracked; but of an evening, at the slightest provocation, it clattered behind the customer with impudent virulence.

7 SPEAKING Discuss the questions with the class.

- 1 Why do you think people are interested in stories about spies and secret agents?
- 2 Do you like this genre of fiction? Why?/Why not?
- 3 Do you know any writers from your own country who write spy stories or mysteries?

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

JOSEPH CONRAD
THE SECRET AGENT



1 SPEAKING Work in pairs. Discuss the conspiracy theories. Have you heard any of them before? Do you believe any of them?

- 1 The US military has known for years that UFOs exist but is hiding the truth from the public.
- 2 The 1969 Apollo moon landing did not really happen – it was filmed in a TV studio on earth.
- 3 Elvis Presley did not really die – he faked his own death because he was tired of being famous.
- 4 The HIV/AIDS virus was created by scientists.
- 5 The US government were behind the bombing of the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001.
- 6 Princess Diana, who died in Paris in 1997, was murdered on the orders of the British royal family.

2 Read the article, ignoring the gaps. Which of the conspiracy theories in exercise 1 are mentioned?

CONSPIRACY are they out

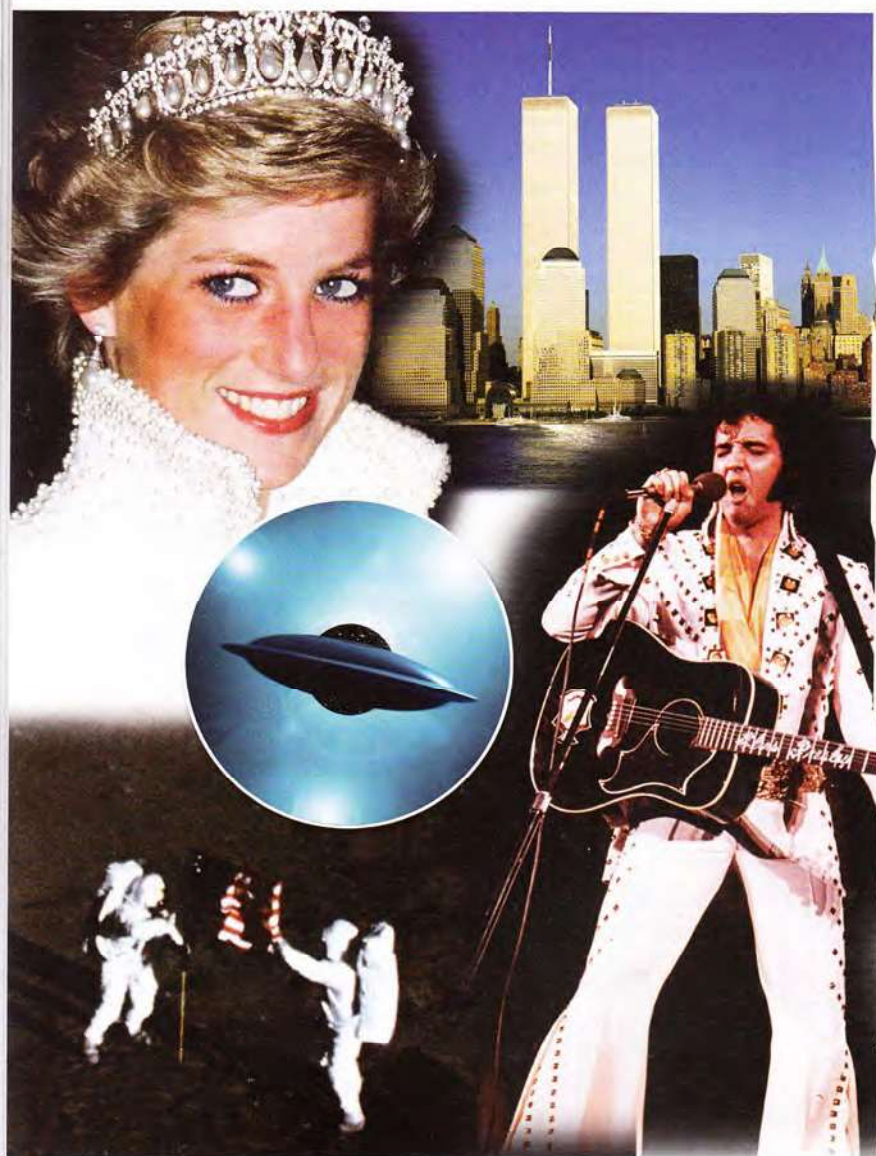
In 2003, a former government minister in the UK called Michael Meacher claimed that the US Government had known all about the September 11 attacks but let them happen to justify grabbing control of the world's oil supplies. That such a bizarre conspiracy theory broke out from Internet chatrooms, grabbed the mind of a former minister and was splashed across the media reflects the growing popularity of conspiracy theories. ¹ ☐

Although Mr Meacher admitted that he got much of his information from websites, he made his claim in the respected British newspaper *The Guardian*. The newspaper later published letters from readers relieved that the truth had come out. David Aaronovitch, a *Guardian* columnist, expressed alarm that his newspaper had given credibility to such 'rubbish'.

According to David Alexander, author of *Conspiracies and Cover-Ups – What the Government Isn't Telling You*, 'There's been a tremendous increase in conspiracy theories about September 11.' In 1998, Rich Buhler, an American radio show host, set up *Truthorfiction.com* to track and prove or disprove hoaxes, urban myths and conspiracy theories. ² ☐ Mr Buhler said: 'The Internet has proven a valuable tool for conspiracy theorists – they exchange ideas and fuel the stories. They have a much larger canvas than before. There's an impression that whatever is written is more reliable than what is said. When it is written down, as it is on the Internet, it comes packaged as truth.'

Yet there are other reasons why conspiracy theories are gaining currency – in particular the complexity of our rapidly changing world. 'A conspiracy theory becomes more compelling when reality makes less sense, when life is beset by problems, when the established order suddenly changes – even something as simple as losing a job. If people can't absorb what's going on, conspiracy theories help us to make sense,' Mr Alexander said. ³ ☐ 'If people just knew a little more, they would know the thing is false,' he said.

People are becoming further removed from seats of political and industrial power. Patrick Leman, a



THEORISTS: to get you?

psychologist at Royal Holloway College, London, who has been studying why conspiracy theories are so appealing, said: 'Conspiracy theories feed into a feeling of disconnection with government. People don't like gaps in their accounts; they have a need to believe them. They invent fantastical things that protect them from the real world.' In one experiment, he showed people footage of a fictional president who was shot at, and provided fictional newspaper articles. ⁴ ☐ He concluded: 'People think that a big event must have a big cause, but often things are caused by mistake or accident, not conspiracy.'

Thousands of people die in Europe every year in car accidents resulting from fast driving and too much alcohol. But when Diana, Princess of Wales died, many could not accept that such an important event could have such a simple cause. Many believed that she was assassinated by the secret services to stop her marrying a Muslim. In Australia there were 161 suspected drownings between 1961 and 1985 in which the bodies were never found. But when Harold Holt, the Prime Minister, disappeared when swimming in 1967, conspiracy theories ran wild. ⁵ ☐

Such is the public appetite for conspiracy theories, there is money to be made. Bart Sibrel makes money selling his video claiming that the first moon landing was a fake.

There is no simple way to determine the truth of a conspiracy theory. 'The danger lies in buying overarching explanations of complex events. That having been said, there's danger in being too complacent and buying into pat explanations of extraordinary occurrences,' Mr Alexander said. In other words, scepticism can go too far. When stories began to circulate about the Bilderberg Group, a secretive grouping of the world's political and business elite, most people dismissed it as just a conspiracy theory. ⁶ ☐

Mr Alexander says that the growth of conspiracy theories is not something just to laugh at. 'It's dangerous if your belief system makes you see the world in a way that's unreal. Conspiracy theories can affect a whole society and make the society mad.'

3 Match sentences a–g with gaps 1–6 in the text. There is one sentence that you do not need.

- a His organisation now gets 1,000 such stories a week.
- b People were more likely to believe that there was a conspiracy behind it if he was killed than if he was uninjured.
- c And yet, it really does exist: members agree not to reveal the contents of their discussions, and the minutes of the meetings are not published for 50 years.
- d Observers of the phenomenon, more pronounced in America than here, say that their increasing prevalence is destabilising vulnerable individuals and undermining society.
- e That is how conspiracy theories gain momentum, even though there is no real evidence to support them.
- f One held that he had been spying for the Chinese, and was spirited away by a Chinese submarine.
- g A limited understanding of the world makes conspiracy theories seem more plausible.

4 Rephrase the underlined parts of these excerpts from the article in your own words.

- 1 A bizarre conspiracy theory was splashed across the media.
- 2 They ... fuel the stories.
- 3 When it is written down ... it comes packaged as truth.
- 4 There are other reasons why conspiracy theories are gaining currency.
- 5 People are becoming further removed from seats of political and industrial power.
- 6 When Harold Holt disappeared, conspiracy theories ran wild.
- 7 Such is the public appetite for conspiracy theories, there is money to be made.
- 8 There's danger in buying into pat explanations.

VOCABULARY BUILDER 9.2: LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: WORKBOOK PAGE 112

5 SPEAKING Give an example of:

- 1 a story that has been splashed across the media very recently.
- 2 something which, in your opinion, is fuelled by the Internet.
- 3 something which is packaged as truth, but in your opinion is not.
- 4 an idea which is gaining currency in your country.
- 5 one of the main seats of power in your country.
- 6 a rumour which has run wild in your school but which may not be true.
- 7 something which there seems to be a growing public appetite for in your country.
- 8 something which you personally refuse to buy into.

6 SPEAKING Discuss the questions with the class.

- 1 Describe any conspiracy theories that are specific to your own country.
- 2 Why do so many conspiracy theories involve the USA?
- 3 Are conspiracy theories harmless or damaging? Give reasons.