

## 5 READING & SPEAKING



- a How much do you know about crime fiction? Look at the photos, and, in pairs, try to match investigators A–H to the stories they appear in.
- 1868 *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins
  - 1887 *A Study in Scarlet*, Arthur Conan Doyle
  - 1934 *Murder on the Orient Express*, Agatha Christie
  - 1942 *The Body in the Library*, Agatha Christie
  - 1971 *Columbo*, Richard Levinson and William Link
  - 1992 *The Dogs of Riga*, Henning Mankell
  - 2007 *The Killing*, Søren Sveistrup
  - 2011 *The Bridge*, Hans Rosenfeldt
- b Have you read any books, or seen any films or TV series featuring these detectives? Did you enjoy them?
- c Now read an article by Dr Erica Wickerson from Cambridge University, which contrasts different styles of crime fiction. What is it that makes *The Moonstone* and *The Bridge* different from typical crime fiction?
- d Read the article again and match last sentences A–G to gaps 1–7.
- As Gabriel Betteredge says, we are left burning 'with detective fever', on the edge of our seats about what could happen next.
  - But both *The Moonstone* and *The Bridge* play with time in a particular way that enhances the suspense already provided by the question: whodunnit?
  - Each time there is a major breakthrough with the case, it increases the sense of threat about what will happen next.
  - And the movement back and forwards continues.
  - However, we are intermittently dragged backwards to past events as well.
  - One strand moves backwards in time while the other moves forwards, creating a constant tension.
  - With the suspense plot we wonder: what has happened and what is about to happen?

# Why do we care WHODUNNIT?

From Sherlock Holmes to Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple to Columbo, Sarah Lund to Saga Norén, we have long been gripped by detective fiction. An opium addiction, elaborate moustaches, a knitting habit, a shabby overcoat, lovely Nordic jumpers, and a green Porsche: the only thing these idiosyncratic and frequently frustrating sleuths seem to have in common is their ability to solve crimes. So what is it that makes the whodunnit such compelling entertainment? A crime is committed, the detective arrives; we watch in suspense as he or she tries to piece together the clues to apprehend the baddie in time. A killer is on the loose, and they need to be caught. But this misses the complexity of detective fiction. The trick in fact lies in its manipulation of time.

Tzvetan Todorov, the Bulgarian-French critic, said that there were three types of narrative drive in crime fiction: the drive of the whodunnit, that of the thriller, and that of the suspense plot. The whodunnit effectively moves backwards to piece together past events (à la Poirot); the thriller moves forwards in step with the characters (à la James Bond); the suspense plot combines both (à la Hitchcock). The whodunnit poses the question: what happened? The thriller makes us ask: what will happen next? <sup>1</sup>

This formula has had us riveted for at least 300 years. Crime writing was popular in the 18th century, with the added tension of the death penalty imposed even for minor misdemeanours. It was, however, only really in the 19th century that the idea of the whodunnit was born. The poet T.S. Eliot believed that Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) invented the genre. The great crime-writer Dorothy L Sayers called it the finest example ever written, and its tale of theft, murder and intrigue continues to grip 21st century readers. More recently, the final season of the Nordic noir series *The Bridge* garnered huge contemporary audiences at home and abroad. *The Moonstone* is set in an upper-class English country home in 1848. *The Bridge* takes place between Sweden and Denmark in 2018. *The Moonstone* follows the disappearance of a priceless diamond stolen by the British from India. *The Bridge* investigates the gruesome murder of a civil servant. At first glance, these two works seem totally different. <sup>2</sup>

Most classic detective stories start with a crime, and then pit an ordinary policeman against the brilliant mind of the private detective or amateur sleuth. There is one plot, and the whole story is told in retrospect by one narrator, typically by a loyal companion (e.g. Dr Watson for Sherlock Holmes), who replicates the experience of the reader, witnessing events and desperately trying to keep up. *The Moonstone* and *The Bridge*, on the other hand, contain not one but two interwoven plots. <sup>3</sup>

Wilkie Collins structures *The Moonstone* in a highly innovative way, using multiple narrators. The story oscillates between the drive backwards on the quest for





knowledge, and the drive forwards as a kind of thriller. Rachel Verinder, a young heiress, is bequeathed the priceless but cursed moonstone. On the night of her 18th birthday, the jewel goes missing. The investigation into the crime by Sergeant Cuff dominates the beginning of the story. The first narrator is the head servant, Gabriel Betteredge, who writes down not only what he remembers of the theft, but also of the original tragic history of the moonstone, moving us backwards in time. But at the same time, the investigation moves forward; we focus on relationships in the present, while the puzzle of the past lingers in the background. <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

*The Bridge* plays with perspective and time in a similar way to *The Moonstone*. Season four starts with one murder which is quickly followed by two more bodies. When detective Saga Norén discerns a pattern in the murders – execution methods used to carry out death sentences – suspense about the future rises. We discover that there are seven methods of execution used in the world today, so four more to come. Who will the victims be? And when? <sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

But also, by season four, the audience already knows some of the characters' histories. Now, we find Saga in prison, falsely convicted of murdering her mother, and conducting an unofficial investigation into the historical disappearance of her colleague Henrik's children. We continually look back to the characters' pasts – Saga's childhood and Henrik's hallucinations of his daughters – alongside the forward-moving investigation into serial killings in the present. As with *The Moonstone*, the development of personal relationships and the investigation provide forward momentum. <sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

The puzzle of detective fiction is enthralling. The characters may know something that we desperately want to discover, or we may have witnessed something and worry that the detectives won't catch up in time. This timing of knowledge is crucial to the creation of suspense. But the really thrilling stuff combines multiple plots and multiple time perspectives. In expert hands, this combination creates constant momentum. It is not simply the concealing of the significance of certain clues or emphasizing red herrings, but a careful oscillation between piecing together past events and foreshadowing future ones. <sup>7</sup> \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from *The Independent*



- e Make notes on what the article says about points 1–5 below. Then compare with a partner.
  - 1 the difference between a whodunnit, a thriller, and a suspense plot
  - 2 the basic plot of a typical detective story
  - 3 where and when *The Moonstone* and *The Bridge* are set
  - 4 examples of the plot moving forwards and backwards in *The Moonstone*
  - 5 examples of the plot moving forwards and backwards in *The Bridge*
- f **Language in context** Look at the highlighted words and phrases connected to crime. With a partner, say what you think they mean.
- g If you haven't already done so, would you like to read *The Moonstone* or watch *The Bridge*? Do you generally 'care whodunnit'?

## 6 GRAMMAR complex passive forms

- a Rewrite two sentences about the plot of *The Moonstone* in two different ways.
  - 1 Her uncle leaves Rachel a priceless moonstone.
    - a Rachel...
    - b A priceless moonstone...
  - 2 There is a rumour that someone had stolen the moonstone from an Indian temple.
    - a The moonstone is rumoured...
    - b It is rumoured...
- b **G p.128 Grammar Bank 7A**
- c Work in small groups. Look at the prompts and try to come up with something or someone for each one. Give more details.

### Can you think of a book or a film / TV series where...?

- someone is falsely accused of a crime
- a prisoner escapes after having been locked up for several years
- the person responsible for a murder is never caught
- someone is suspected of having committed a crime but is never convicted

### Can you think of a news story where someone...?

- is or was suspected of being involved in spying
- has or had been imprisoned without trial for political reasons
- was given points on their driving licence
- had something valuable stolen or was burgled

- d Compare with another group. Did you come up with any of the same answers?

(So, a film where someone is falsely accused of a crime is *The Shawshank Redemption*...