

Murder in the classroom: Teacher's notes

Skills: Reading, speaking, listening

Grammar: Past tenses, past continuous action interrupted by a past simple action.

Level: Pre-intermediate +

Age group: Teens/young adults

Materials: Character cards, worksheet

Time: +/- 50 minutes

Procedure:

Step one:

Explain to the class that you are going to play a murder mystery game. Everyone will be a character in the game and one of them is the murderer! Give them the background information:


Background Information

During a school reunion a scream is heard from one of the classrooms. It's 8:30 pm. A few minutes later the dead body of Miss Eliza McGowan, a cranky old English teacher, is found. She has been hit on the head. Also found were a number of items that may lead us to the killer: a book written by one of her ex-students, Simon Donnelly, a photograph of one of her fellow teachers, a young man called Saul Sheen, and a handkerchief with the initials I.W. At the moment these are the three main suspects but everyone who was at the party and saw or spoke to Miss McGowan needs to be questioned.

Step two

You need 7 students to play the game. The main character cards all contain clues to working out the mystery. For bigger groups use the supplementary cards (they contain no real clues) or for groups of fourteen or more, split the students into two groups and play the game as a competition to see who can work out the mystery first.

Give each student a character card. They need to read and memorize the information.

The aim is to act out the game, become the character and not to just read the information from the card. At this point answer any questions students might have about their character. 

Step three:

Hand out the worksheets, explain to the class they need to collect information about everyone who was at the party and fill any relevant information on the sheet. At this point go over key vocabulary: alibi, motive, clue.

Elicit from the class the questions they need to ask and write on the board for reference:

What is your name?

Why were you at the party?

What was your relationship with Ms. McGowan?

When did you last see Ms. McGowan?

What were you doing when you heard the scream?

Step four:

This stage is a mingling activity with students asking questions and collecting information. Monitor the language used at this point and correct where necessary.

Step five:

When the students have spoken to everyone who was at the party, have them go back into their original groups. Take back the character cards. Using the information they have collected, the students try to work out *who* killed Ms. McGowan and *why* they did it. This part of the lesson usually leads to some lively discussion, most students will quickly guess who the killer is but the information needs to be carefully looked at to work out the why.

Solution

Mr. Green is Saul Sheen's father; he and Miss McGowan had a relationship in college. Miss McGowan has always kept it a secret but after the last argument with Saul she plans to tell him the truth. She tells Mr. Green about her plan and they argue. Louise King overhears them. Mr. Green is furious and it is he who follows Miss McGowan to the classroom and hits her over the head. He wasn't in his office when everyone heard the scream, that's why when Saul Sheen knocked on the door he got no answer.

Main character cards: these 7 cards need to be used to solve the mystery

Your name is Simon Donnelly; you are an ex-student.
Memories of Miss McGowan: She was a very tough teacher, she made you do extra writing assignments and she said you had talent but you hated all the extra work. But now you're grateful, you're a writer, you have just written a new book and you dedicated it to Miss. McGowan.
Last time you saw Miss. McGowan: You saw Miss McGowan at about 7 pm, you gave her a copy of your new book and she was pleased.
When you heard the scream: You were talking to Louise King, another ex-student.

Your name is Louise King; you are an ex-student.
Memories of Miss McGowan: You thought she was an old hag, you hated her class, she gave too much homework, she made you hate school so you stopped going. You didn't do your exams and now you work in a chicken factory. You think it's all Miss McGowan's fault. You're glad she's dead!
Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You went outside for a cigarette at about 8 pm, you saw her with Mr. Green, it looked like they were arguing and it seemed serious. Anyway, they were talking about someone called Paul or Raul or something.....you couldn't hear very well.
When you heard the scream: You were glad for the distraction; you were trying to escape from boring Simon Donnelly.

Your name is Saul Sheen; you are a teacher at the school.
Opinion of Miss McGowan: She was a very serious woman, she wasn't easy to like.
Last time you saw Miss McGowan: Nobody at school knows this but Miss McGowan was your mother, she gave you up for adoption when you were a baby. You were having an argument because she wouldn't tell you who your father was. It was about 7:30 pm.
When you heard the scream: You were looking for Mr. Green, the headmaster, you knocked on his office door but there was no answer.

Your name is Ivan Williams; you are the caretaker at the school.
Opinion of Miss McGowan: You thought that she was a very classy lady; it surprised you that she wasn't married. You wanted to invite her to dinner but you were afraid she would say no.
Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You saw her arguing with Mr. Sheen. You never liked him; he was always upsetting poor Miss McGowan. You went to see if she was okay, you loaned her your handkerchief, you always carry one because you have allergies.
When you heard the scream: You were cleaning the floor in the men's toilets.

Your name is Lily Simmons; you are an ex-student.
Memories of Miss McGowan: She was a very scary teacher, most of the students worked hard because they were afraid of her. You did very well in English and, because of Miss McGowan, you are training to be a teacher.
Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You spoke to her briefly at about 7:45, you were telling her about your studies, she didn't seem interested, she kept looking around, then she saw Mr. Green and said she had to go. You thought she was a bit rude.
When you heard the scream: You were dancing in the Sports Hall with some of the other ex-students.

Your name is Edward Green, you are the headmaster at the school.
Opinion of Miss McGowan: You have known Miss McGowan since you were both students in college, you thought she was a wonderful woman, you will miss her very much.
Last time you saw Miss McGowan: You were very busy this evening, you didn't see Miss McGowan.
When you heard the scream: You were in your office working on the computer.

Your name is Patricia Woods, you are a teacher at the school.
Opinion of Miss McGowan: She was a good teacher but she didn't have very many friends.
Last time you saw Miss McGowan: She was walking to her classroom, it was about 8:15 pm and she looked upset. You think she was crying; she was wiping her eyes with a handkerchief.
When you heard the scream: You were serving drinks with some of the other teachers in the Sports Hall.

Supplementary character cards: these cards can be used for larger groups, they don't contain information for solving the mystery

Your name is Janice Carroll, you are a teacher at the school.
Opinion of Ms. McGowan: You only just started at the school so you didn't really know Ms. McGowan.
Last time you saw Ms. McGowan: You didn't see Ms. McGowan at all.
When you heard the scream: You were talking to some of the other new teachers in the Sports Hall.

Your name is Mike Newell, you are an ex-student.
Opinion of Ms. McGowan: She wasn't one of your teachers when you were at school but you always heard from your friends that she was very strict.
Last time you saw Ms. McGowan: Early in the evening, the party was just starting.
When you heard the scream: You were getting something to drink in the Sports Hall.

Your name is Judy Hall, you are an ex-student.
Opinion of Ms. McGowan: She was very strict, not very friendly, most of the students were afraid of her.
Last time you saw Ms. McGowan: When you arrived at the party, before 7 pm.
When you heard the scream: In the Sports Hall dancing with an old school friend, Lily Simmons.

Your name is Hal Johnson, you are the receptionist at the school.
Opinion of Ms. McGowan: She was a polite woman, not very friendly but you didn't have any problems with her.
Last time you saw Ms. McGowan: This afternoon while we were getting ready for the party. You arrived late for the party and you didn't see her all evening.
When you heard the scream: You were washing your hands in the men's room.

Worksheet:

Name	Motive	Alibi	Clue
Simon Donnelly			A copy of Simon Donnelly's book was found in the classroom where Miss McGowan was killed..
Saul Sheen			A photograph of Saul Sheen was found in Miss McGowan's pocket.
Ivan Williams			Miss McGowan was holding a handkerchief with the initials I.W. in her hand when she was killed.