The Fugitive

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About the TV series and film
The book The Fugitive is based on the screenplay of the extremely successful film The Fugitive, which was released in 1993. The film was based on the TV series The Fugitive, an American series starring David Janssen. It was shown in many countries for four years, from 1963 to 1967. Kimble, a doctor, is looking for the killer of his wife. He is being chased by the police, who think he killed her. In each episode Kimble finds himself in an impossible situation. Bubonic plague, a hurricane, kidnappers, blackmailers, and a woman who looks exactly like his dead wife are among the terrible things he has to deal with. Even today, over decades after the final episode was broadcast, there are ‘Fugitive’ fan clubs and Internet websites detailing the events of every episode.

The film The Fugitive, made in 1993 and starring Harrison Ford as the hero, fits the whole story into two hours. The result is a very fast-moving thriller, with one exciting event following closely on another. The budget for the film with its expensive action scenes, particularly the highly realistic train crash, was enormous. Audiences already knew Harrison Ford as an adventuring hero from his earlier films such as Star Wars, Blade Runner and Indiana Jones. He plays a similar role as the fugitive. His enemy in the film is the dark and sharp Police Detective Gerard, brilliantly played by Tommy Lee Jones, who won an Oscar for his performance.

Summary
This exciting adventure story takes place in Chicago in the United States. At the beginning of the story we meet Dr Richard Kimble, a successful doctor working at Chicago Memorial Hospital. He is with his friend, Dr Charlie Nichols and Dr Lentz who is working on a new drug.

Chapter 1: On the night of his hospital’s fund-raising party, there is an intruder in Kimble’s house and his wife Helen is shot and killed.

Chapter 2: Kimble sees the intruder briefly, and notices that he has an artificial arm, before the intruder knocks him out and escapes into the night. Kimble is arrested for the murder of his wife. With no evidence to support his story, he cannot prove his innocence and he is sentenced to death.

Chapter 3: On the way to the state prison, however, Kimble escapes. He runs into the darkness, determined to look for the man with one arm.

Chapter 4: Detective Gerard and his team start to chase Kimble. Kimble is nearly caught in a tunnel, but he escapes again by jumping into the Tennessee River far below.

Chapter 5: Kimble manages to get back to Chicago. He wants some help from his friends, but only Nichols helps him.

Chapter 6: Kimble disguises himself as a cleaner and finds a list of the patients with artificial limbs at Cook County Hospital.

Chapter 7: Kimble narrows down the list to five men. Soon he has only two – Driscoll at the prison and Sykes.

Chapter 8: Gerard nearly catches Kimble at the prison, and yet he lets the chance slip through his fingers. Kimble finally finds out who Helen’s killer is.

Chapter 9: Kimble believes Lentz paid Sykes to murder him because Kimble suspected the new drug RDU-90 was dangerous, but Nichols tells him Lentz had died in a car accident.

Chapter 10: Kimble thinks that Lentz was hiding evidence of the new drug’s harmful side effects, but then realizes that his friend Nichols is the one he is after.

Chapter 11: Kimble confronts Nichols, who now tries to kill him. Now Gerard also knows the truth, Kimble’s life as a fugitive finally ends.

Background and themes
The Fugitive is an action thriller with a fast-moving plot. The action starts on the first page and does not stop until the last page. It is a classic of its type and fits into a long tradition of adventure stories where wrongly accused men try to prove their innocence.
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Life as a fugitive: Kimble is transformed at the beginning of the story from a successful, white, middle-class professional into a penniless, homeless, jobless wanderer who has to learn to live on the edge of society. His experience becomes that of the social outcast. He has done nothing wrong, and yet people stare at him and he is not allowed to live a normal life. He has no access to money or work. He can only stay alive by stealing, borrowing money from friends, staying in miserable rooms, hiding and running.

Justice and the law: In Kimble’s relationship with Police Detective Gerard, the story cleverly contrasts ‘justice’ and ‘the law’ and shows that they are not always the same thing. Kimble stands for justice: we know he is innocent – we were there when his wife was murdered. Detective Gerard stands for the law – if the law has found Kimble guilty, then he is guilty. And Gerard believes the law must be upheld. At one point, although Gerard knows that Kimble may be innocent, he still shoots to kill him to stop him escaping. Kimble is only saved by the strong bullet-proof glass of the prison doors. Natural justice defeats inflexible law in the end. With his determination to find his wife’s real killer, Kimble gradually wins the respect and sympathy of Gerard. At the end of the story, Gerard becomes Kimble’s ally and together they catch Nichols, the real culprit.

Big business vs. the ‘little person’: There is a political message behind the story of The Fugitive. Big business versus the ‘little person’ is always a popular theme in films and novels. Big business in this story is represented by the pharmaceutical company, Devlin-MacGregor. The development of new drugs is one of the most potentially profitable areas of human activity – imagine the profits for the company that finds a cure for AIDS, malaria or even cancer. The story suggests that Devlin-MacGregor is more concerned about profits than about any human suffering caused by its drugs. The message of the film is that there is no moral foundation to the company. Multi-national corporations have become the big power bases at the turn of the century, and have enormous influence. In some countries we have seen governments change their policies to suit the corporations that finance government election campaigns. So when an ordinary individual decides to take on a big corporation, he or she can usually rely on the reader’s support.

Discussion activities

Chapter 1
Before reading
1 Listen and predict: Explain that the man on the front cover is a fugitive – he is running away from the police. Write the following questions on the board.
   • What is the fugitive’s name?
   • What is his job?
   • Why is he in prison?
   • Who murdered his wife?

   Explain that The Fugitive was a popular TV programme long before it became a film or a book and that each week it opened with the same words. Tell them that they’re going to listen to some of the opening words from the TV programme. Students do not need to understand every word. Have them listen for the answers to the questions above. Read out the following words, spoken at the start of each episode of the TV series:


   Richard Kimble has been tried and convicted for the murder of his wife. But laws are made by men, carried out by men. And men are imperfect. Richard Kimble is innocent.

   Richard Kimble saw the man who killed his wife. A man with one arm. A man he had never seen before. A man who has not yet been found.

After reading
2 Discuss: Ask students to imagine that there is someone in the house. Have a whole-class discussion about what they are supposed to do in an emergency.

Chapter 2
After reading
3 Role play: Have students work in groups of three. Two are policemen, the third is Kimble. They act out the conversation between the police and Kimble after Helen’s death. The police ask a lot of questions. They don’t believe Kimble’s story.

4 Discuss: Talk about false accusation. Put students into small groups. Ask them if they know of any case of false charges against someone. Have them discuss why these wrong accusations occur, and ask them what they would do if they were wrongly accused.

Chapter 3
Before reading
5 Discuss: Talk about Richard Kimble. Now the trial is finished and Kimble is sentenced to death. Ask the class what they think Kimble would / might do until the day of his execution.
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After reading
6 Discuss: Right or wrong?
Have students work in pairs to talk about Kimble's escape. Ask them if they think it was the right thing to do.

Chapter 4
Before reading
7 Predict: Ask the class to imagine what the life as a fugitive is like. Encourage them to think about what they would need to do about food, clothes and sleep.

After reading
8 Discuss: Talk about Gerard.
Put students into small groups, and ask them what they think of Gerard. Encourage them to describe Gerard, and also prompt them to predict what Gerard is going to do now that Kimble has jumped into the river.

Chapter 5
After reading
9 Pair work: Have students work in pairs to find two things that made Gerard change his mind in this chapter.
At the beginning of the chapter, Gerard says 'Now I know Kimble did it.' At the end, he is not so sure. What two things make him change his mind?

Chapter 6
Before reading
10 Discuss: Have students talk about what happened when Kimble wanted some help from his friends. Ask them what they would do if they were asked to help.

After reading
11 Group work: Have students work in small groups to discuss the following question.
Kimble lies on his bed in the cold, dark room. He talks to Helen in his head. What does he say to her?

Chapter 7
After reading
12 Discuss: Talk about what Kimble did about the injured boy. Have the class think of the reasons why Kimble helped the boy even though his true identity might have been revealed. Ask them what they can tell about Kimble's personality from this incident.

Chapter 8
After reading
13 Discuss: Have students work in groups to ask each other the following questions.
- Why did Gerard fire his gun?
- Why did Kimble call Gerard from Sykes's flat?

Chapter 9
After reading
14 Discuss: Talk about Lentz. Put students into small groups. Have them exchange their opinions about the death of Lentz.
Charlie Nichols tells Kimble that Lentz died in a car accident. Do you think it was really an accident? What do you think really happened?

Chapter 10
Before reading
15 Discuss: Talk about the phone reports.
Gerard wants to find the phone reports for Kimble and Sykes for the past two years. He wants to know if they talked on the phone or not. Why?

After reading
16 Role play: Have students work in pairs and act out the conversation between Charlie Nichols and Sykes on Kimble's car telephone on the evening of Helen Kimble's murder.

Chapter 11
Before reading
17 Discuss: Talk about ending.
Divide the class into two groups. Now that we know who the real culprit is, ask one group to come up with ideas for a happy ending. Ask the other group to come up with a sad ending.

After reading
18 Role play: Have students act out the conversation between Kimble and Gerard after everything was finished.
19 Discuss: Talk about Richard Kimble's new life. Have students work in groups to discuss the following questions.
- How do you think Richard Kimble will feel after Charlie Nichols is caught?
- Do you think he will go back to his old job at the hospital?
- Will he want to start a new life in a new city?
Later, ask groups to share their opinions with the rest of the class.

Extra activities
20 Discuss: Talk about the story.
Put students into small groups. Have them ask each other if they enjoyed this book and which characters they like best. Encourage them to give reasons for their answer.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.