Detective Work

John Escott

About the author
John Escott started out writing children’s books and stories for children’s comics, and nowadays, he writes and adapts books for students of all ages. He especially enjoys writing crime and mystery thrillers, which inspired him to become a member of the British Crime Writers’ Association.

Escott was born in Somerset, which is located in the south-west of England, and at present, he lives on the south coast in Bournemouth. When he isn’t writing, he enjoys taking long walks along empty beaches, watching old Hollywood movies on video and searching for long-forgotten books in tiny backstreet bookshops. He also likes travelling, especially in the United States and Canada. He is married, with two grown-up children and three grandchildren.

Summary
Chapter 1: One summer, sixteen-year-old Paul gets a holiday job at the local museum in his hometown. He is pleased and excited about the job because it will enable him to earn some money, which he needs. He is also interested in history, which he is studying at school, and he is looking forward to working with Anna, a girl he is attracted to. On the day that he begins his job, a valuable exhibit also arrives at the museum. It is a beautiful diamond necklace, on loan from a wealthy local family.

Chapters 2–11: Two weeks later, the necklace is stolen—in spite of the guards and security cameras. It is clear to Paul that everyone who works in the museum is a suspect. He is also interested in history, which he is studying at school, and he is looking forward to working with Anna, a girl he is attracted to. On the day that he begins his job, a valuable exhibit also arrives at the museum. It is a beautiful diamond necklace, on loan from a wealthy local family.

However, unfortunately the police seem to think that he is the most likely culprit! In order to prove his innocence, Paul must try to find out who the real thief is and set a trap for him (or her). He has to work fast! He dreams up a daring plan, and in the story’s thrilling climax, the truth is finally revealed.

Background and themes
A classic ‘whodunnit’: Detective Work is a classic detective story, or ‘whodunnit’, which is a colloquial expression for the question, ‘Who did it?’ It is designed to appeal to students of secondary school age. Its hero is a young man who is typical of other protagonists in stories by the same author. He is a quick thinker who finds himself in a difficult and possibly dangerous situation, but thanks to his intelligence, creativity and resolve, in the end, he manages to solve the mystery and identify the thief—and more importantly, get himself out of trouble!

Removed from reality: Detective stories are one of most popular types of fiction ever created. They offer readers a world of pleasure and excitement—a world that is removed from the reality of their own lives. The detective story as a distinct variety of writing dates back to 1841 with Edgar Allan Poe’s Murder in the Rue Morgue. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle developed the genre further with his Sherlock Holmes stories in the later part of the nineteenth century. However, the golden age of the detective story is said to be the early part of the twentieth century, when authors such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers wrote their bestselling stories. Christie’s mysteries still rank among the highest-selling books of all time.

Interactive reading: The classic detective story consists of two main elements: the story of the crime and the story of the subsequent investigation. The detective, who is the main character in the book, attempts to discover possible motives, opportunities, alibis and other useful evidence. By eliminating the suspects one by one, he or she is eventually able to reveal the identity of the criminal, who is then either arrested or killed. To make things more difficult for the detective—and more interesting for the reader—the author adds many different complications, such as a number of possible suspects, false trails and even threats to the detective’s safety. Often, clues are placed strategically throughout the book for an observant reader to spot, giving him or her a chance to solve the puzzle of the mystery. The underlying question in detective stories is whether or not the reader can identify the culprit before the answer is revealed by the author. In this way, detective stories become interactive, which accounts for much of the genre’s popularity.
Detective Work

Identifying with the main character: All the elements of a classic detective story are present in Detective Work. In addition to the problem-solving aspect of the book, the ‘detective’ is a character with whom young readers can easily identify. Paul isn’t a wizened detective or police officer—he is just a normal kid trying to make some extra money by working at a part-time job. He reminds young readers of themselves, which helps to further engage them in the story. Paul also has a personal interest in solving the crime because he is falsely accused by the police. Students can easily understand his desperation in the situation because being unfairly accused of wrong-doing is a common occurrence in the everyday life of teenage schoolchildren. At the end of the story, the readers can take great satisfaction as Paul succeeds in proving the adults wrong. The story assures them that there is justice in the world—that truth really does prevail in the end.

Entering the workforce: Detective Work contains another theme that secondary school students find relevant to their own situations—the theme of entering the workforce for the first time. Finding employment can be a difficult and worrying time for teenagers. Paul is very excited to get a chance to work in a job where he can make a significant contribution to an important project. However, he has to meet and interact with lots of new people. The problem is—are the people really who they say they are? Can their appearances really be trusted? And what about his own history? Will the mistakes that he made in his younger years return to make things difficult for him in the present? For Paul, the workplace is somewhere that is filled with unknowns—and unknowns are frightening.

Making the reader want to read: Detective Work is an exciting book whose pages readers will want to turn as quickly as possible to discover the answer to the mystery. Students will need no encouragement to read the story, and they will enjoy meeting the challenge of trying to work out in advance who committed the crime. They will also appreciate the story’s final surprise!

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–3, pages 1–18

Before reading

1 Discuss: Ask students to look at the picture on the cover of the book. What can you see? What are the people doing in the picture? What do you think the story will be about? What do you think will happen in the story? Do you think the story will be exciting or dull? Why do you think this?

2 Pair work: Write the names of Chapters 1–3 on the board in the wrong order, i.e. Stolen!, Questions, The Necklace. Then put students into pairs and get them to discuss the names of the chapters and try to put the chapters in the right order (remind them not to look in their books). Finally, ask them to provide reasons for their choice. When they have finished, the pairs should stand at the front of the classroom and share their choice and reasons with the rest of the class.

After reading

3 The alibi game: Write the word alibi on the board and teach students what it means. Put students into pairs and get them to choose one of the following pairs of characters to be. The characters should have a discussion to decide where they were, what they were doing, what they saw, heard, said, etc., between 10.30 and 11.20 a.m. on the day that the necklace was stolen.

   a Paul and Anna
   b Roger and Cora
   c Linda and Mr Yardley
   d Derek Halliday and Ian Maxton

When they have finished, choose a pair to be questioned by the class. Student A should stay in the classroom and Student B should go out into the corridor. The class should ask Student A questions about his or her alibi for the robbery—the questions should be as detailed as possible. After Student A has finished answering the class’s questions, Student B should come into the classroom and answer the same questions about his or her alibi. If Student B can’t give the same answers as Student A, the pair is ‘guilty’ of stealing the necklace.

4 Discuss: Put students into small groups and get them to discuss the following questions:

   Have you ever done something that you hope people don’t remember? If so, why do you hope people don’t remember it?

   Do you think people should be forgiven for the mistakes they have made in the past? Why or why not?

   Do you think people can change? Why do you think this?

Chapters 4–6, pages 19–30

Before reading

5 Discuss: Get students to look at the picture on page 20. What is happening in the picture? What is Paul doing in the picture? How do you think he is feeling? Why do you think this? What do you think he is thinking about? Why do you think this?

6 Write: Write the following combinations of letters on the board—they are anagrams of words that can be found in Chapters 4–6. Get students to spell the words correctly. When they have finished, some of the students should stand at the front of the class and read the words to their classmates.
Detective Work

After reading
7 Artwork: Get students to draw a picture to describe how Paul feels when Mr Balfour tells him that the police suspect that he stole the necklace at the end of Chapter 6. When they have finished, they should stand at the front of the classroom and describe their picture to the rest of the class.

Chapters 7–9, pages 31–45
Before reading
8 Guess: Ask students to predict what Paul will do in Chapters 7–9.
9 Research: Put students into pairs and get them to look up the word *innocent* in a dictionary. Make the exercise into a competition—the first pair of students to find the definition wins. They should stand up and read the definition out loud to the rest of the class.

After reading
10 Check: Review students’ predictions about what Paul would do in Chapters 7–9. Check if their predictions were right or wrong.
11 Discuss: Point out to students that at the end of Chapter 8, Paul decides to try to catch the thief on his own. Write the following sentences on the board:
   a Paul must make the thief collect the necklace from the museum; and
   b Paul must trap the thief. Put students into small groups and get them to discuss how Paul can accomplish the things described in the sentences. When they have finished, some of the groups should stand at the front of the classroom and share their ideas with the rest of the class.

Chapters 10–11, pages 46–55
Before reading
12 Guess: Write the names of the following characters on the board: Anna Wain, Cora Turner, Derek Halliday, Greg Turner, Ian Maxton, Linda Jones, Mr Balfour, Mr Yardley, Mrs Morgan and Roger Fox. Put students into pairs and get them to discuss who they think stole the necklace. When they have finished, ask each student who they think stole the necklace, and write the student’s name on the board under the corresponding character’s name.

After reading
13 Role play: Write the word *tableau* on the board and teach students what it means. Then put students into groups of three and get them to choose a scene from Chapter 10 or 11. They should stand up and make a tableau to express the scene. Remind them that they must keep still and refrain from talking. When they have finished, they should stand at the front of the classroom and make their tableau in front of the class, and the class should guess which scene from Chapter 10 or 11 the tableau expresses.
14 Role play: Put students into groups of four and get them to role play the scene at the end of Chapter 11. Student A is Paul, Student B is Mr Balfour, Student C is Detective Chief Inspector Craven and Student D is Inspector Todd. They should discuss who stole the necklace and how the person(s) managed to steal it.
15 Write: Put students into pairs and get them to look at the pictures in Chapters 10 and 11. Then get them to write a new caption for each of the pictures to describe what is happening in the picture.

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