About the author
Wilkie Collins can be described as the author of the first full-length detective stories in English. Born in 1824, he was the son of a landscape painter. He was educated at private schools, but received his real education on a two-year tour of Italy with his family. He trained as a lawyer, but became a full-time writer in his early twenties. During the 1860s he became a household name, with the publication of novels of mystery, suspense and crime. Of these novels, *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868) were the most successful, and are still widely read today.

Collins was rated very highly by contemporary critics and his books were widely read in both America and Europe. The famous author, Charles Dickens, was his friend and mentor, and like Dickens, Collins was a tireless social campaigner. Although Collins continued to write, after 1870 his novels concentrated more on social issues such as prostitution and vivisection than on good story telling.

Collins suffered from gout, and he was addicted to opium for the last twenty-seven years of his life (at the time, opium was considered to be a safe painkiller). Collins’s private life was unconventional; he had two mistresses and married neither of them, although he had three children by one of them, Martha Rudd. He died in 1889.

Summary
*The Moonstone*, written in 1868, is one of the greatest detective stories every written. The story begins in 1791, when an Englishman, John Herncastle, steals a huge yellow diamond from a Muslim palace in India. The ancient diamond, called the ‘Moonstone’, had originally been in the possession of Hindu priests. The stone was cursed; those who wrongly possessed it had disasters befall them. The curse would only be lifted when it was returned to the priests.

John Herncastle dies in 1848, leaving the diamond to his pretty niece, Rachel Verinder. Rachel receives the stone on her birthday. That same night it disappears from the house. Suspicion falls on a young maidservant who commits suicide some weeks later. But there are others in the house who may be involved. For example, two young men, Franklin Blake, Rachel’s cousin, and the good looking Godfrey Ablewhite, both in love with Rachel, were both present on the night of the theft. And then there are the three Hindus who called at the house on Rachel’s birthday. But since the house was well locked up, it seems they could not have entered and stolen the diamond. The mystery seems unsolvable. But in the end we discover Franklin has taken the Moonstone while under the effects of opium. Godfrey later takes the stone from his room and pawns it to pay his debts. In the end, Godfrey is killed by the Indians who take the stone back to its temple.

Pages 1–16: Mr Franklin Blake arrives bringing the Moonstone, a diamond that is cursed. He will give the diamond to Miss Rachel as a birthday present as stated in his father’s will. To avoid any negative consequences from keeping the stone, Franklin takes it to the bank and the Moonstone is finally given to Rachel before her dinner party starts.

Pages 17–32: Dr Candy, Franklin Blake, Mr Murthwaite (an explorer), Miss Clack (a distant cousin of Miss Rachel’s), Mr Godfrey Ablewhite (lawyer and Rachel’s cousin) are guests at the party. In the morning, they all discover that the diamond is gone. Superintendent Seegrave comes to investigate. He suspects Rosanna Spearman, the housemaid. The Commissioner of police sends Sergeant Cuff. He is mainly concerned about a smear on the door and looks for the dress that may have caused that. He believes it is Rosanna’s dress. Gabriel and he follow her to the Yolland’s house where they are told she is planning to escape.

Pages 32–45: Cuff discovers Rosanna has bought cloth to make a gown to hide the smear. Miss Rachel leaves the house to live with her aunt, Mrs Ablewhite in Fritzing Hall. Cuff and Gabriel find out Rosanna committed suicide in the Shivering Sands. Lady Herncastle, Rachel and Franklin leave to London. Mr Septimus Luker, a
dealer in Oriental jewels claims three Indian men have been annoying him.

Pages 45–54: This part of the story is narrated by Miss Clack. She explains how Mr Godfrey has received a letter in which a woman invites him to a house with the intention of giving him money for charity. There he is attacked. Nothing is stolen but an Oriental Book. Something similar happens to Mr Luker who is also led to the same apartment and robbed of a receipt for a valuable object he has left in a bank. Lady Herncastle informs her niece, Miss Clack, that she is very ill and asks her to witness the signing of her will.

Pages 55–67: Godfrey proposes to Rachel and she accepts him. Lady Herncastle dies. In her will, she names Godfrey’s father as Rachel’s legal adviser. Later, after talking to Mr Bruff, her mother’s lawyer, she breaks the engagement saying she is in love with another man. Godfrey’s father feels insulted and decides not to be Rachel’s adviser. Mr Bruff has learnt Godfrey wants to marry Rachel for financial reasons, informs her of this, and so she breaks the engagement.

Pages 68–85: This part of the story is narrated by Franklin Blake. He is truly in love with Rachel but, even though she feels the same way, she refuses to see him. So, he is decided to find the thief who stole the stone. Franklin gets a letter from Rosanna. In it, Franklin finds instructions that lead him to find his own nightgown with a smear of paint. This has led Rosanna to believe he is the thief but, as she loves him, decides to hide the evidence. All this is a shock to Franklin as he is sure he has not taken the Moonstone. He goes to London and sees Rachel who confesses she has seen him taking the Moonstone. Franklin goes to see Dr Candy who wants to meet him but, Dr Candy is very ill and cannot recall what he needed Franklin for.

Pages 85–101: Ezra Jennings, Dr Candy’s assistant, suggests an experiment with opium to help Franklin remember everything that happened the night of Rachel’s birthday. The experiment proves Franklin took the Moonstone while under the effects of opium. Sergeant Cuff discovers after following some clues, that Godfrey was the one who took the Moonstone from Franklin’s room because of his financial difficulties when he appears dead, killed by one of the Indians who recovers the stone and takes it back to India.

Background and themes

The detective novel: *The Moonstone* first appeared in serial form in a magazine in 1868. It was hugely popular and readers anxiously awaited the next installment. This was not surprising, for with *The Moonstone*, Collins had written the first full-length detective novel. The book had the necessary ingredients: a detective called in to solve a seemingly unsolvable mystery, a complex plot, clues that leave the reader puzzled and curious, and a wonderfully unexpected ending. The poet TS Eliot called the story ‘the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels’. Wilkie Collins was an undisputed master of this genre, and a previous novel of his, *The Woman in White* (1860) written in this style, had also enjoyed great success. Collins’s advice to novelists, ‘Make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait,’ was advice that he himself observed to the full.

Types of narrators: *The Moonstone* has a clever, intricate plot. Like *The Woman in White*, the story is told by different narrators, under the direction of Franklin Blake as ‘editor’. (Franklin Blake is Rachel Verinder’s cousin and is in love with her.) In this way, the reader is given different views of the same characters and this adds to the interest of the story. The solution to the mystery of the gem’s disappearance is quite simply brilliant. The last thing the reader expects is that Franklin Blake, the ‘editor’ of the novel, should be the culprit, the person who takes the Moonstone. But there is a further twist to this, again wonderfully unexpected. All the clues to the theft are carefully embedded in the story; it is simply that you do not see them as relevant. It is only at the end of the story that everything fits into place.

Characters: Collins’s portrayal of minor characters in the novel is interesting. He portrays servants with great sympathy and in this way is ahead of his time. For example, Rosanna, the maidservant who falls under suspicion for the theft, is described as ugly, with a misshapen shoulder. To her misfortune, she falls in love with Franklin Blake, who has no interest in her at all. But her unhappiness is described with compassion; we are made to feel that this is a real person deserving of love, despite her lowly status. Another minor character who draws our attention is Miss Clack, a relative of Rachel and narrator of a section of the novel. A religious fanatic, her continual attempts to force her religious books on her relatives and friends are genuinely amusing; Collins uses
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her to poke gentle fun at those who claim to be religious yet have no real charity.

Opium: The author incorporated his experiences with opium into the novel and the effects of opium on a person play a key part in the story. In The Moonstone, a doctor, Ezra Jennings, is dying from a painful disease for which he takes the drug. Thus, he understands its effects and is able to help unravel the mystery.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Discuss: Write the following words on the board. Get students, in pairs, to try and put the words together below to make a story about a ‘moonstone’.

Moonstone detective locked up
house maidservant curse India jewel
Three Hindus disappearance

2 Pair work: Get students to read the first paragraph in the introduction. Ask them to put the lines below into the right order to continue the information presented in it. Then ask them to read the second and third paragraphs of the Introduction and correct their answer.

a But the jewel is not a gift – it is a curse.
b Because the Colonel
c disaster will follow the thief of the stone and all who receive it
d eighteenth birthday.
e When Colonel John Herncastle dies in England, a hated, lonely
f stole the beautiful Moonstone from India and he knew that
g after him.
h old man, he leaves a jewel to his niece, Rachel Verinder,
i for her

3 Discuss: Have a class discussion based on the following questions:
Do you believe in magic?
Do you believe in curses?
Have you ever heard of any story in which magic and curses are part of it? Which?

Pages 1–16

While reading

4 Role play: Ask students to work in pairs. One of them will be Gabriel Betteredge, the other one will be Franklin Blake. Ask them to act out the conversation they may have had after Mr Franklin comes back from having left the Moonstone at the bank.

5 Discuss: Get students to discuss the following questions and present their views to the class
a What do you think the Indians use the Ink for?
b Do you think it is an effective method? Find evidence in the story to support your ideas.

After reading

6 Role play: Ask students to work in pairs.
Student A: You are Franklin Blake. Tell Betteridge about your fears for the Moonstone and for Rachel.
Student B: You are Betteridge. Tell Franklin about the three Indians who came to the house. Tell him about the shadow you saw and the bottle of black ink on the ground.

7 Discuss: Get students to explain the relationships between these people.
a Gabriel Betteredge/Lady Julia Verinder
b John Herncastle/Lady Julia Verinder
c Rachel Verinder/John Herncastle
d Franklin Blake/Rachel Verinder
e Rosanna Spearman/Lady Verinder

Pages 16–31

Before reading

8 Discuss: Ask students to discuss and say what they know about these people:
Godfrey Ablewhite Dr Candy Mr Murthwaite

While reading

9 Discuss: Ask students to discuss in groups the relevance of the following words in the story so far:
SUSPICIOUS
SERVANT
CRAZINESS
MAGIC
DOUBT

10 Role play: Get students to work in pairs and role play the following conversation.
Student A: You are Superintendent Seegrave. Discuss your suspicions about the theft of the Moonstone with your colleague.
Student B: You are a colleague of Superintendent Seegrave – he is your superior. Discuss the case of the Moonstone with him. Listen to his ideas and offer your own.

After reading

11 Discuss: Put students into pairs, and ask them to discuss the following questions. Then have a whole class discussion on their ideas.
a Why is Franklin nervous on Rachel’s birthday?
b Why do you think Godfrey Ablewhite says ‘Annoying’ after his conversation with Rachel in the rose garden?
c Why do you think conversation is so difficult during the birthday dinner?
d Why does Mr Franklin annoy Dr Candy?
e Why can’t the Indians have stolen the diamond?
f Why do you think Rachel won’t leave her room?
g Why does Franklin think that Rosanna is behaving very strangely?
h Why is Rosanna behaving so strangely, do you think?
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Pages 32–45
Before reading
12 Discuss: Get students to answer the following:
   a Where do you think Rosanna can be?
   b Is she responsible for the theft?
   c How can you explain her behaviour?

While reading
13 Role play: Get students to work in pairs. Students act the scene between Rachel and her mother, in which Lady Verinder tells her daughter that Rosanna’s dead. She also tells Rachel of Sergeant Cuff’s suspicions. Tell students that they will find it helpful to look at Lady Verinder’s letter on pages 41–42.
14 Write: Ask students to write down Cuff’s reasons for suspecting Rachel. Then they show their reasons to another student and discuss their ideas.

After reading
15 Discuss: Have a class discussion on what Rosanna may have said in her letter to Franklin. Write the class’s conclusions on the board. Then in pairs, students write this letter.

Pages 45–54
Before reading
17 Discuss: Get students to present their opinions on the following question:
   a What part do you think Septimus Luker will play in the story?

While reading
18 Discuss: Get students to express their views on the following:
   a Who says these words? Why, in his opinion, are they true? Do you agree with Mr Bruff? Say why/why not.
   ‘Miss Rachel’s innocence is without doubt. So is Mr Ablewhite’s. So is Mr Franklin’s.’

After reading
19 Discuss: Ask students to imagine they are Drusilla Clark. Ask half of them to describe Rachel from Drusilla’s point of view. Ask the other half to describe Godfrey Ablewhite.
20 Write: Ask students to write a letter as if they were Drusilla Clark to one of her friends of the Young Mothers’ Small Clothes Society about the events she witnessed while spending time at Lady Herncastle’s home.

Pages 55–67
Before reading
21 Predict: Ask students to express their views on what Mr Godfrey Ablewhite may mean when he says to himself: ‘Do it today! You must do it today!’ (end of page 55) Write down students’ ideas on the board.

While reading
22 Discuss: Ask students to try to find information that supports or rejects their predictions to explain what Godfrey Ablewhite meant when he said: ‘Do it today! You must do it today!’ (end of page 55)
23 Discuss: Ask students to answer this question: Why do you think Rachel ended her engagement to Godfrey Ablewhite?

After reading
24 Role play: Get students to act out the scene between Mr Ablewhite and his wife after Ablewhite says he will not be Rachel’s legal adviser any more.
25 Write: Ask students to imagine they are Rachel. Ask them to write a letter to a friend describing their feelings now that their mother is gone. Get them to tell their friend about Godfrey Ablewhite.

Pages 67–85
Before reading
26 Discuss: Write the titles of the chapters in the section on the board (see below). Then, in pairs or small groups, students have to predict the right order of the titles.
   Investigating
   Return to London
   Next June
   Lost Memory
   Instructions
   Franklin’s Return
   Opium
   Rosanna’s Letter
   Witness
   Money-Lending

While reading
27 Discuss: Ask students to pay attention to the following words and to explain who they may be connected to:
   SUSPICIOUS
   CONFIDENCE
   TRUE
   DISBELIEF
   HOPE
   DOUBT
   FAITH
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28 Role play: Ask students to work in pairs. One of them is Rachel, the other one is Franklin. Ask them to act out the scene in which Rachel tells Franklin she saw him taking the Moonstone. Give them ten minutes to get ready so that they can perform the dialogues for the whole class.

After reading
29 Write: Ask students to imagine they are Rachel. Ask them to write the entry to her diary right after she talks to Franklin. Ask them to write about her feelings, doubts, thoughts, etc.
30 Predict: Have a class discussion based on the following questions:
What do you think Dr Candy wants to say to Franklin when he asks him to visit him? Why do you say so?
What do you think Ezra Jennings means when he says, 'I'm afraid sir, that Dr Candy is sadly changed.'

Pages 85–101
Before reading
31 Predict: Ask students to predict what may happen next in the story. Use the following questions as a guide:
How can you explain what Franklin Blake did the night of Rachel's birthday? Did he actually steal the diamond? Is he pretending when he says he does not remember? Why does he think what he did is impossible? Why can't he remember it?

While reading
32 Discuss: Have a class discussion on the following questions:
What experiment with opium does Jennings suggest? Why does he suggest this? Do you think it is a good idea?
Who do you think really stole the diamond? Say why you think this.
33 Predict: Ask students to stop reading right after the experiment is over and everybody realizes Franklin was under the effect of opium when he took the Moonstone and how he forgot everything about the previous night when he woke up in the morning. (page 94)
Ask students to predict how the stone reached Luker and who may have taken it from Franklin's room.

After reading
34 Pair work: In pairs, students play Sergeant Cuff and Bruff discussing the case of The Moonstone.
35 Write: Imagine you are Rachel. Write about your feelings when you learn the truth about Godfrey Ablewhite.

Extra activities
36 Write: Imagine you are a journalist. Write a newspaper report about the death of Ablewhite and his theft of the Moonstone.
37 Group work: Put students into groups of four or five. Taking turns, each student thinks of a character in the book. They say something in the role of that character (For example, as Sergeant Cuff, a student could say, 'I should have realized that Rachel is an honest young woman.') The other students have to identify the character.
38 Discuss: Select eight students. Each of them will be one of the characters from the book. Do not tell the rest of the class who they represent. Give these students ten minutes so that they collect as much information as they can about their character. Get the students to ask each of them yes-no questions so that they discover who each of their friends represents.
CHARACTERS:
Franklin Blake
Godfrey Ablewhite
Gabriel Betteredge
Miss Rachel
Rosanna Sergeant Cuff

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