

# The Break-In

## A Clue by Clue Mystery



An ESL / ELA Activity to  
practice critical thinking and  
close reading

### What is a Clue by Clue?

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**Clue by Clues** make great warm-up activities, fillers, or time killers for those last minutes of class and early finishers. They can be critical reading activities that teach students to **read closely** for details, **synthesize information** from different sources, apply **prior knowledge** about the world, and to **recognize the logic** of a claim and evaluate its validity.

They are also a lot of fun!

While students are solving the mysteries they are also developing their spoken language skills, such as:

- **Modal verbs of speculation:** She must have forgotten her keys, It could have been the butler
- **Opinion language:** I think..., I'm positive..., I'm not sure...
- **Hedging:** It's possible, probably, maybe, it's not impossible.
- **Conclusions:** That means that...
- **Emphasis:** There's no way that...
- **Hypotheticals:** What if he didn't do it, If he was at the movies, he couldn't have done it.

### How to Use Clue by Clues

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1. To prepare, make one copy of the student page for each pair or small group of students.
2. Cut out the clue strips for each group and make a small stack, being careful to preserve the order.
3. In class, warm up by asking students if they know the meaning of Whodunit? Explain that it is slang for "Who did it?", meaning who committed a crime? It's a way of referring to mystery novels or films that the reader tries to solve as he or she reads or watches.
4. You can also warm up by discussing famous mystery stories or listing all the mystery authors students can name.

## Clue by Clue Teacher Sheet

5. Put students into pairs or small groups.
6. Hand out the situation and read it to them as they read along. Go over the guest list and make sure everyone understands the names and relationships.
7. Give them 3-5 minutes to discuss what might have happened. In more advanced groups, students could begin talking about what information they need to know, and even forming questions they need the clues to answer. You may want to have the groups appoint a secretary to keep track of theories.
8. Give each group the first clue and let them read it. Alternatively, you could project the clues one by one on a class screen, or write them up on the board.
9. Give each group 3-7 minutes to speculate on the meaning of the clue and what they think happened. Monitor the groups to help with comprehension and also to gauge when students have exhausted the new information. If needed, you can remind students how the new clue relates to older clues.
10. Hand out the second clue and again give them 3-7 minutes to speculate on the clue and how their opinion may have changed. Many clues are significant only in tandem with other earlier clues. Often a clue will either confirm or refute an earlier clue. Encourage students to go back through clues and even lay related clues out next to each other.
11. Once they have gone through all the clues, have the students discuss all the evidence as a whole. Students can stay in their groups, or you can put two small groups together to make new and larger groups. For longer mysteries, you could organize a sort of mock-trial or mock police investigation based on the evidence.
12. Then ask each student to say what they think happened. Be sure to encourage students to speak in detail. It's not enough for them to say they think Suspect One is guilty. They need to give reasons. As with many mysteries, there is often a short list of suspects so guessing is easy.
13. As time permits, discuss the follow-up questions. You can prompt them with questions like, "Did she do anything to kill him on purpose?" or "What if she hadn't read the article? Would it be different?"

### The Break-In

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#### The Situation

Tuesday morning, James Kilpatrick arrived at his clothing store to find the door wide open. However, when he checked the store inventory, he found nothing missing. Why did someone break into his store?

#### Hints

- 1) Who benefited from James's store closing?
- 2) Could someone else have put those clothes in James' store?
- 3) The people didn't break in to steal anything. What did they do in the store?

#### The Solution

The High Fashion Department store framed James to put him out of business. They hired people to break into James' store. But the people who broke into the store didn't take anything. Instead they brought the fake clothing and hid it in the store. James didn't think to look for anything new in his store so he didn't notice. Then the owner of the High Fashion Store called the police and told them where to look for the illegal clothing.

#### Follow up Questions

1. Do you think copying or counterfeiting designer clothes should be illegal or not?
2. Do you think it's ok to use a brand name close to a famous name such as "Calvin Kleen" or "Amani" to sell clothes?
3. Do you think having clothes made by a famous designer is important?
4. Would you ever buy a piece of expensive clothing just because a famous designer made it?

## The Break-In

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People break into a store but take nothing. Why did they do that?

### The Situation

Tuesday morning, James Kilpatrick arrived at his clothing store to find the door wide open. However, when he checked the store inventory, he found nothing missing. Why did someone break into his store?

### The Clues

1. The owner of the store next door reported seeing a white van parked behind James' store Monday night.
2. The day after the break-in, police got a phone call that James was selling pirated designer clothing in his store.
3. The police found pirated clothing with fake designer labels on them hidden in a closet in James' store.
4. James swore he was innocent, but he was fined \$50,000. He couldn't pay and went out of business.
5. Jacques' Fashion Boutique, which was almost bankrupt, reported much better sales after James' store closed.

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