Cat Among the Pigeons

agathe Christie

SUMMARIES

Part 1: Prologue to Chapter 4

We meet all the main characters briefly as term begins. Jennifer's mother, Mrs Upjohn, notices someone she recognizes from her work with secret agents during the war, but Miss Bulstrode does not hear who. In Ramat, Prince Ali knows he is in danger from the Revolution, and asks his friend Bob Rawlinson to hide some jewels. Bob tells his friend at the British Embassy that he has important information. Then he goes to his sister's hotel room. He wants her to take the jewels back to the UK, but he does not want to put his sister in danger, so does not tell her his plan. Instead, he hides the jewels in her luggage while she is out. Unfortunately, Bob does not realize that the woman in the next hotel room can see him...

Bob and Prince Ali are killed in a plane crash. At the British Secret Service, the mysterious Mr Robinson tells Colonel Pikeaway that the jewels may be in Julia and Mrs Sutcliffe's luggage. Secret agent Adam Goodman is sent to Meadowbank School to watch Prince Ali's cousin, Princess Shaista, secretly. He pretends to be the new gardener.

Someone knows about the luggage, because it is nearly stolen three times.

Part 2: Chapters 5-12

No one likes the new games teacher, Miss Springer. Miss Bulstrode has decided to retire, and begins to wonder who should replace her. Miss Chadwick is too old, and everyone expects Miss Vansittart will be the new head teacher, but Miss Bulstrode likes Miss Rich's enthusiastic attitude. Jennifer and Julia swap their tennis racquets, which they keep in the new Sports Pavilion.

Soon after, Miss Springer is shot dead one night in the Sports Pavilion, and the police come to investigate. Only the school matron and Miss Chadwick have an alibi. Princess Shaista tells the police that she is in danger: people want to kidnap her to get Prince Ali's jewels, but the police do not believe her. They want to talk to Julia's mother about the person she saw on the first day of term, but she is travelling in Turkey. Jennifer is happy when a strange American woman gives her a new tennis racquet and takes her old one away to be repaired. Her friend Julia thinks this is strange.

Part 3: Chapters 13-17

Students and staff are allowed to leave the school on the third weekend of term. The Emir arranges a car to collect Princess Shaista. When she has left, a second car comes to collect her, and Miss Chadwick becomes worried. That night, she sees a light in the Sports Pavilion again, and when she goes to investigate, she finds Miss Vansittart – dead. The police also realize Princess Shaista has been kidnapped.

Miss Bulstrode decides she must close the school until the two murders are solved. Jennifer's mother takes her daughter home to keep her safe, and Julia is left alone at school. She becomes suspicious about the tennis racquet she swapped with Jennifer. Inside the handle, she finds some jewels! That night, someone tries to get into her room, so she decides to go and find help. She takes the jewels to the London house of Hercule Poirot and tells him her story.

Part 4: Chapters 18-25

Poirot comes to Meadowbank and begins to investigate the French teacher, Mlle Blanche. He also wants to find Julia's mother. He uses pictures drawn by Miss Rich to prove that Jennifer is not good at recognizing people's faces. Miss Bulstrode finally decides to choose Eileen Rich as the new head teacher, but strangely, Eileen does not want to accept. Ann Shapland, Miss Bulstrode's secretary, talks to Adam about Poirot – it seems she has guessed that Adam is a secret agent. In Turkey, the British Embassy finally finds Julia's mother travelling on a bus. Mlle Blanche leaves the school to make a telephone call: she is trying to blackmail the murderer! When she returns to Meadowbank, however, someone is waiting for her, and murders her.

Poirot gathers everyone together to explain what he has discovered. He explains that Princess Shaista was kidnapped in Switzerland before the school term began. The girl at Meadowbank was only pretending to be the Princess. Julia's mother comes into the room and recognizes the dangerous agent, Ann Shapland! She saw Bob hiding the jewels in Ramat, and paid the old secretary at Meadowbank to leave, so that she could work at the school. Miss Springer found Ann looking in the Sports Pavilion, so Ann killed her. She also killed Mlle Blanche. Ann suddenly tries to shoot Mrs Upjohn, but Miss Chadwick jumps in front of her and Miss Bulstrode to protect them. The bullet hits her. As she dies, Miss Chadwick admits that she killed Miss Vansittart because she was jealous. Miss Rich wants to be the new head teacher, but she is afraid she will bring scandal to the school. Miss Bulstrode forgives her.

Poirot gives the jewels to Mr Robinson, who gives them to Prince Ali's wife – an Englishwoman who secretly had Prince Ali's son.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 1 (Prologue to Chapter 4)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Explain that the UK state primary and secondary education system is very complicated, as different regions have different traditions. Put these words on the board or on pieces of paper. You could omit the year counts or have students match these separately; if you use them, point out that 'year 1' means 5 years old. Guide them towards producing a layout something like this:

Nursery School		
Infant School	Primary School	First School
(yrs 0-2)	(yrs 0-6)	(yrs 0-4)
Junior School	Secondary School	Middle School
(yrs 3-6)	(yrs 7–11)	(yrs 5-8)
Senior School	or Grammar School	Upper / High
(yrs 7–11)	(yrs 7–11)	School (yrs 9-13)
Sixth-Form / College (yrs 12–13)		

Ask students to explain the system in their own countries. Meadowbank is a private school, but would fit into one of these systems.

2 Listening

Listen to the Prologue and write T or F (true or false) next to the statements:

- Miss Bulstrode started Meadowbank School with Miss Chadwick.
- 2 ___ Ann Shapland has worked at the school for a long time as secretary.
- **3** __ The new French teacher, Mademoiselle Blanche, is a plump, loud woman who likes mice.
- 4 __ Eileen Rich left Meadowbank, but now she is back.
- **5** __ Miss Bulstrode is a tall, impressive woman with grey hair.
- **6** Princess Shaista had just come from a school in Switzerland, so she cannot speak English well.
- 7 ___ Miss Bulstrode saw Mrs Upjohn walking along the path drunk.
- 8 __ Mrs Upjohn saw something surprising from the window in Miss Bulstrode's office.

After reading

3 Speaking

Meadowbank is a private school for girls. Use these bullet points to discuss students' beliefs about schools like Meadowbank, and their own experiences of school. This activity could be turned into a full debate.

'single-sex education is better than mixed'	'private education is preferable to state'
 boys and girls learn differently boys and girls mature at different rates the opposite sex is a distraction to learning boys are more assertive than girls in the classroom mixed schools pressure students to choose subjects according to gender 	 only 7% of UK children, but more than 1/3 of the UK's MPs are privately educated [The Economist, 2008] private schools have better facilities and exam results education should create equal opportunities state schools give a broader social education
 single-sex education is discriminatory 	 private schools encourage competition

4 Writing

Colonel Pikeaway tells John Edmundson about Bob and Ali's plane crash (p. 16). Students should write this episode up as an exciting newspaper report for a local English-language newspaper, **The Ramat Courier**. Students should include an exciting headline (you might want to do some work on the special features of headline language), and a description of the accident. Next, elicit the background information we have: the situation in Ramat, the rebellion, the previous attack on Ali and Bob's plane (p. 8), Ali and Bob's background and friendship, the sabotage attempt on the plane, and maybe the jewels. (Ali and Bob's private conversation would not be known by journalists, however.) Use all of this information to write up the article. Students can work alone or in pairs.

5 Speaking

Divide students into small groups, and assign or let them choose which of the scenes below they want to play. You could have the students perform the best skits in front of the class. Then use this as an opportunity for a class discussion on the relevance of the scene to the story.

- The meeting between Miss Bulstrode and Mrs Upjohn (Prologue, pages 5–6). This skit needs two pairs: Miss Bulstrode and Mrs Upjohn, and Miss Chadwick and (a drunk) Lady Veronica.
- Ali and Bob Rawlinson (Chapter 1). This skit needs just two people, plus a table and a bag of 'jewels'.
- Colonel Pikeaway, John Edmundson and Adam Goodman (Chapter 3). This skit could include Mr Robinson if there is time, and if you want to keep the group numbers to pairs and fours.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 2 (Chapters 5-12)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Check that students understand the term 'boarding school'. Find out whether any of them have experience of this kind of school. Why might parents send their children to boarding schools? Divide students into small groups and ask them to imagine life in a boarding school – how would it be different from life at a day school? (If students have problems with this, remind them of J.K.Rowling's *Hogwarts* from the *Harry Potter* series.) Brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages (regarding both academic achievement and daily life) of life in a boarding school.

2 Listening

The letters from Meadowbank School give lots of useful background information and gossip. Have students listen to them and answer the questions.

Julia Upjohn's letter:

- 1 Who is Julia's new friend? What do they like to do together?
- **2** What do people say Miss Bulstrode is going to do? What do they say will happen?
- 3 What is Miss Rich like?
- 4 Who is Miss Springer? What is she like?
- **5** What does Jennifer say about Prince Ali? *Jennifer Sutcliffe's letter:*
- **6** What does she want from her mother?

Ann Shapland's letter:

7 When is she going to meet Dennis for dinner?

The school matron Miss Johnson's letter:

- **8** Does she want Miss Vansittart to be the new head teacher? *Miss Vansittart's letter:*
- 9 Does she expect to become the new head teacher?

After reading

3 Writing

Elicit from students how they communicate with friends and family back home. Use this as an opportunity to practise informal email writing. Layout isn't important in emails, but there is usually a greeting ('Dear...', or more likely 'Hi'), and paragraphs should be used to group ideas. Informal emails are very chatty, so this is a good chance to practise a form of colloquial speech. Stress that the students should use contractions and informal vocabulary. Have them write a short (100 to 150 words maximum) email to you (or on paper if there's no easy access to the internet) describing their life at the moment, what they are doing inside and outside class, and

their classmates. To avoid sensitivities, tell them not to write anything too personal or slanderous — warn them that other people might see the emails!

4 Language

Draw students' attention to the title of Chapter 7, and tell them that English has many sayings involving straw! Give each pair of students one of the sayings below on a piece of paper and see if they can guess the meaning. This is a good chance for them to use modals of uncertainty ('It could/might/must mean...'). When they've explained their guesses to the class, give them the meanings and see if they can match them.

- Haha, you've drawn the short straw! You've chosen the worst / most unpopular option!
- That's the final straw! After lots of bad experiences, this last bad experience makes you give up.
- You're clutching at straws now! You are desperate for any answer or help.
- Let's have a straw poll on it. Let's just quickly check what people think about this.
- That's the straw that broke the camel's back. The same as 'the final straw'.
- It's just a straw in the wind. It's a small detail, but
 it might tell us something about the future.

5 Playing detective

Match the names to the 'significant' phrase, then explain what the connection is. This activity could be done by putting the names and the words on pieces of paper. Students have to then match the words or phrases to the people, and discuss what the details tell us about the characters. Do the students think any of these might be useful clues?

name	significant phrase
Princess Shaista Ann Shapland Eileen Rich Eleanor Vansittart Julia and Jennifer Princess Shaista Jennifer	brassiere old mother fresh ideas 'perfect the way it is' name labels kidnapping 'new lamps for old' (check Aladdin in the Cultural notes if you're not sure about this)

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 3 (Chapters 13-17)

Before reading

1 Speaking

When they are talking about Princess Shaista being so mature, because she has done so many things in her life already, Miss Bulstrode says to Miss Chadwick 'Perhaps in this country we keep our children young for too long.' What do the students think about this?

Use this as a basis for a discussion. Here are some possible questions based on personal experiences:

- What is your first memory?
- What are your top 3 memories of childhood?
- Talk about three things you enjoyed when you were a child: a book, a TV programme, a game.
- Did you enjoy school?
- Talk about a favourite and a least favourite teacher.
- Who were your best friends?
- Do you have any special memories of things you did at school?
- What did you want to be when you were a child?
- Is there anything you would change about your childhood?
- If you have children, what are/will be the most important considerations for you when you are bringing them up?

2 Speaking

In Chapter 13 Julia says: 'I think ... that we'll probably have a second murder soon. ... there's usually a second murder in books'. Ask students if they read many detective books. Do they agree with Jennifer? Will someone else be murdered? Who and why?

Brainstorm other genres of books (e.g. horror, science-fiction, romance, kung-fu, historical, etc.). Let students in pairs choose two and imagine what would happen next if this book belonged to the genres they chose. Share ideas with the class. This could be made into a **writing exercise**: students write up a brief report (about 50 words) of their ideas and post them on the classroom walls. Students could vote for the funniest / strangest / most exciting.

After reading

3 Speaking

Check to see how much students know about the Aladdin story. What are the similarities between that story and this? (A dirty old lamp was full of magic – an old tennis racquet is full of jewels.) Divide students into pairs (or if you have a multinational class, you could group them by country/region). Ask them to think of a folktale they know and make some notes so that they can retell it. If the class is small, they

can tell the story to the whole class; for larger classes, divide the students into groups of 3-4 and have them retell their stories in their groups. If students are stuck for ideas, suggest that they retell the plot of a movie/TV programme that is famous in their country, or even the story of a famous historical person/event. This could also be turned into a **writing exercise**.

4 Comprehension

Put students into groups, and ask them the following questions. The first group to answer correctly gets a point.

- 1 What did Jennifer's Aunt Gina tell her in her letter?
- 2 Why does the Emir's secretary ring Miss Chadwick?
- 3 Why does Miss Chadwick say she couldn't sleep?
- 4 What did Miss Chadwick do after she opened the curtain on her way back to bed with a glass of water?
- **5** What is the reason Ann tells Dennis for changing her job so often?
- **6** What weapon did the murderer use to kill Miss Vansittart?
- **7** What did the Emir receive after Princess Shaista disappeared?
- 8 Who does Julia decide to tell after she has found the jewels?

5 Playing detective

How likely are these people to be Miss Vansittart's murderer? Choose 'would' or 'could' and the reason.

person		could / would	reason / alibi
Ann Shapland	a	could / would	not have done it – she has a good background.
Mademoiselle Blanche	b	could / would	have done it, if he was working for someone else!
Miss Johnson	С	could / would	have done it, but there is no evidence against her.
Miss Chadwick	d	could / would	not have done it – she was staying 20 miles away.
Miss Johnson & Miss Chadwick	e	could / would	not have done it – she helped to start the school.
Miss Rich	f	could / would	not have done it – she was with her sister.
Miss Rowan	g	could / would	not have killed Miss Springer.
Adam	h	could / would	not have done it because she was in London.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 4 (Chapters 18-25)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Find out what secret agents or detectives the students know – James Bond '007' and Sherlock Holmes might give them a start. Are there any famous ones in their countries? Ask students in small groups to talk about:

- 1 What kind of person makes a good secret agent?
- 2 What makes a good detective?
- 3 Would you make a good detective or agent? Why / why
- 4 Encourage students to pick 'code names' (like 'agent R' or '007') for each other. Share the best ones with the class. Students choose one person in their group to be a secret agent, one person to be a detective, and one person to be a murder victim. The group then has to think up a short story around this scenario, and make very short notes. The stories could be written up as a writing activity.

2 Playing detective

Elicit the names of the two people who have been murdered, and where they both happened.

Adam tells Inspector Kelsey 'We know there's a well-known secret agent staying in a local hotel. She just finds out useful information — nothing against the law. But we've been told that there's another woman in the area — a woman who was a dancer in Ramat when the revolution started. She works for a foreign government, but we don't know where she is or even what she looks like.' Elicit the names of all the women in the story and write them on the board. Let students speculate on who these two women agents could be. Now elicit the names of all the other main characters and write them on the board. (Just add the extra men's names if you are following on from the previous activity.) Have students discuss in small groups who they think is most likely to be the killer, and why they think that. Get the groups to report back to the class, and see which person the class thinks is most likely to be the murderer.

After reading

3 Speaking

Poirot is a great detective who does everything for a reason, though sometimes the reasons are not clear to other people. Can the students explain why...

- 1 (p. 77) ...he shuts the door in a very obvious way, before he starts to talk to Miss Bulstrode?
- 2 (p. 79) ...he asks about Princess Shaista's knees?
- **3** (p. 83) ...he asks Miss Rich to draw Miss Bulstrode, Miss Rowan, Mademoiselle Blanche and Adam?

4 Comprehension

Here are some of the chapter titles. Ask the students to explain what they mean in the story. This could be done as a class quiz: the first team to answer gets a point. It could also be used as a lesson warmer – the events are written on the board and students match the titles to them.

Chapter 12: New Lamps for
Old
Chapter 15: Murder Repeats
Itself
Chapter 17: Aladdin's Cave
Chapter 22: Incident in Anatolia
Chapter 23: Showdown
Chapter 25: Legacy

5 Speaking

If your students enjoy role-playing, there are some nice set pieces in this final part of the book. Divide them into groups to play one or more of the following scenes.

- 1 In pairs: the death of Miss Chadwick (p. 101, very short)
- **2** In threes: act the final scene between Mr Robinson and Alice Caulder (p. 103 onwards)
- 3 The whole class: act out the showdown between Poirot and Ann Shapland (p. 95 from Poirot telling Inspector Kelsey to bring in Mrs Upjohn to the end of the chapter)

The best ones could be played in front of the class.

6 Comprehension

A quick-fire quiz. Students decide whether the statements are true or false. The first to answer gets a point, and a bonus point if they can correct the false information.

- 1 Poirot is going to contact his friend, the Chief of Police in Belgium, to help investigate Princess Shaista's disappearance. The Chief of Police in Switzerland.
- 2 Miss Bulstrode wants Miss Vansittart to be the new head teacher because she has lots of new ideas, who will think about the future. Miss Rich.
- 3 Miss Rich is afraid that if people find out she went to Ramat to have a baby, the scandal will damage Meadowbank.
- 4 Mademoiselle Blanche is trying to blackmail Miss Chadwick. She is blackmailing Ann Shapland.
- 5 The real Princess Shaista never went to Meadowbank.
- **6** Miss Chadwick saved Miss Bulstrode and Mrs Upjohn's lives.
- 7 Alice Calder keeps all the jewels for herself and her son.– She gives one of the green jewels to Julia.



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Answer Key (Classroom Activities)

Part 1 (Prologue to Chapter 4)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Listening

- 1 T
- 2 F Ann Shapland has only just started at the school
- **3** F The new French teacher, Mademoiselle Blanche, is slim and mouselike.
- 4 T
- 5 T
- 6 F Princess Shaista had just come from a school in Switzerland, and speaks English very well.
- 7 F Miss Bulstrode stopped listening to Mrs Upjohn because she saw Lady Veronica Carlton drunk outside!
- 8 T

3 Speaking

Answers will vary.

4 Writing

Answers will vary.

5 Speaking

Answers will vary.

Part 2 (Chapters 5-12)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Listening

- 1 Jennifer. They do lots of things together, including tennis.
- 2 She's going to retire, and Miss Vansittart will be the new head teacher.
- 3 Wonderful. She makes Shakespeare seem real.
- 4 The Games teacher. She's awful and smells when she's hot.
- 5 That Princess Shaista says she was going to marry Ali, but Jennifer says Ali actually liked someone else.
- 6 A new tennis racquet.
- 7 The weekend of the third week of term.
- **8** No. She thinks she would have to leave if Miss Vansittart became the new head teacher.
- **9** Yes.

3 Writing

Answers will vary.

4 Language

Answers are given in activity.

5 Playing detective

- 1 Princess Shaista **brassiere** Miss Johnson is surprised at how mature Princess Shaista looks. She is only fifteen, but she looks like a woman already.
- 2 Ann Shapland old mother she says she has to keep quitting her jobs to go and look after her mother.
- 3 Eileen Rich fresh ideas Miss Bulstrode wants someone like Eileen Rich to bring fresh new ideas to Meadowbank School.
- 4 Eleanor Vansittart 'perfect the way it is'
 Miss Vansittart thinks she will be the new
 head teacher when Miss Bulstrode retires.
 She doesn't want to change anything about
 Meadowbank. Miss Bulstrode doesn't agree,
 however...
- 5 Julia and Jennifer name labels Jennifer doesn't like her racquet because it feels wrong, so she swaps it with Jennifer. When they swap them, they change the names written on the racquets.
- 6 Princess Shaista kidnapping She tells the police that people are trying to kidnap her because they think she has Prince Ali's jewels. The police don't believe her.
- 7 Jennifer 'new lamps for old' Jennifer gives her old tennis racquet to a strange visitor, who gives her a new one in return. Her friend Julia thinks this is strange. It reminds her of the story of Aladdin, when the old magician tricks Aladdin's wife into giving him the magic lamp.

Part 3 (Chapters 13-17)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Speaking

Answers will vary.

3 Speaking

A dirty old lamp was full of magic – an old tennis racquet is full of jewels.

Answers will varv.

4 Comprehension

- 1 She was glad I'd got a new racquet but that she hadn't sent it.
- 2 Because over four hours after Princess Shaista left the school, she still hadn't arrived in London.
- **3** Because she was worried about Princess Shaista.
- 4 She saw a light in the Sports Pavilion, got dressed, picked up a torch and a weapon, and went to investigate.
- **5** She needs to go and look after her mother when she gets too difficult.
- 6 Something like a sandbag.
- 7 A ransom note.
- 8 Poirot

5 Playing detective

o i injing acto		
Ann Shapland	could	a not have done it because she was in London.
Mademoiselle Blanche	could	<u>b</u> have done it, but there is no evidence against her.
Miss Johnson	would	<u>c</u> not have done it – she was with her sister.
Miss Chadwick	would	d not have done it – she helped to start the school.
Miss Johnson and Miss Chadwick	could	e not have killed Miss Springer.
Miss Rich	could	f not have done it – she was staying 20 miles away.
Miss Rowan	would	g not have done it – she has a good background.
Adam	could	h have done it, if he was really working for someone else!

Part 4 (Chapters 18-25)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Playing detective

Miss Springer and Miss Vansittart, in the Sports Pavilion.

Other answers will vary.

3 Speaking

- 1 (p. 71) He wants the murderer to think he is being secret, so that they will spy on him. Then he can make it clear that Julia does not have the jewels.
- 2 (p. 72) He says that knees can show a person's age, and he suspects that the Princess Shaista at Meadowbank might not be 15 years old.
- 3 (p. 77) He wants to prove that Miss Rowan and Mademoiselle Blanche could easily disguise themselves.

4 Comprehension

2: The Woman on the Balcony	Ann Shapland sees Bob Rawlinson hiding the jewels
4: Return of a Traveller	Jennifer and Mrs Sutcliffe arrive back in the UK with the jewels
8: Murder	Miss Springer is killed
9: Cat Among the Pigeons	Ann Shapland and Princess Shaista – maybe even Adam Goodman – are not the people they pretend to be



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10: Fantastic Story	the false Princess Shaista says she is afraid she will be kidnapped
12: New Lamps for Old	Ann Shapland pretends to be an American woman and swaps Jennifer's old tennis racquet for a new one
15: Murder Repeats Itself	Miss Vansittart is killed
17: Aladdin's Cave	Julia finds the jewels
22: Incident in Anatolia	Derek O'Connor finally finds Mrs Upjohn in Turkey
23: Showdown	Poirot arranges for Mrs Upjohn to meet Ann Shapland
25: Legacy	the mysterious Mr Robinson gives Ali's jewels to his secret English wife

5 Speaking Answers will vary.

6 Comprehension

- **1** F The Chief of Police in Switzerland.
- 2 F Miss Rich.
- **3** T
- **4** F She is blackmailing Ann Shapland.
- **5** T
- 7 F She gives one of the green jewels to Julia.