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SUMMARIES

Part 1: Chapters 1-6

It's Saturday lunchtime, and Poirot and his faithful friend Hastings are sitting by the sea at St Loo, discussing the fate of missing aviator Michael Seton. They happen to meet Nick Buckley, who has recently been the victim of three 'accidents' and when Poirot finds a bullet on the ground and a bullet hole in her hat, he decides she is in danger. They meet her friends Frederica (Freddie), Jim and George (Challenger), and arrange to visit Nick, whose real name is Magdala, at her home, End House. The bullet was from a Mauser; Nick says she has such a gun, but when she searches for it, she finds that it is missing. Nick has a will leaving the heavily-mortgaged house to cousin Charles, a local lawyer, and a small amount of money to Freddie; what can the motive be? Nick has another cousin, Maggie, and for Nick's safety, Poirot encourages her to invite Maggie to stay. Poirot becomes suspicious of Freddie, who lies about her movements, and the Crofts, a couple who rent a cottage from Nick and seem a bit too typically Australian. Mrs Croft tells Poirot that the staid Charles is in love with Nick. Nick tells Poirot that she has mixed feelings for End House and invites Poirot to dinner and to watch a firework display afterwards. Contradictorily, Charles tells Poirot that Nick has a great love for End House, but also reveals he has no alibi for Saturday lunchtime.

Part 2: Chapters 7–11

Newly-arrived Maggie attends the party with Charles, Mr Croft, Freddie and Jim. She and Nick wear black, the latter distinguishable only by her bright shawl. During dinner, the conversation is again about the aviator Seton, and Nick leaves to answer a call. Later they go to see the fireworks, but Maggie and Nick return to the house for coats. Then a body is discovered, wearing black and a bright shawl; but it is Maggie, not Nick, who is dead. Nick had given her the shawl in lieu of a coat. Was Nick the intended victim? Nick goes to a nursing home where she will be safe, and Poirot re-examines possible motives. Money: Charles and Freddie stood to inherit, but very little; love (turned to hate): Charles and Challenger were both spurned suitors; jealousy: Freddie might think Nick wanted her lover, Jim; or fear. Poirot makes a list of suspects A to I (Ellen, Nick's maid, her husband, their son, the Crofts, Freddie, Jim, Challenger, Charles) and then adds J, a person unknown. Seton's death is confirmed in the paper and when Poirot sees how distressed Nick is, she reveals that they were engaged. They had kept their relationship a secret from Seton's father who would have disapproved. But she heard of the death by phone the previous night. Poirot decides to search End House.

Part 3: Chapters 12–17

Ellen tells Poirot about a sliding panel that exists somewhere in the house but she is not sure where. The house search

reveals letters showing Freddie is a drug-user, and love letters from Seton showing that his will leaves everything to Magdala, Nick's real name. Poirot surmises Seton's death made Nick a wealthy woman, giving her beneficiaries, Charles and Freddie, a strong motive for murder. Back at the nursing home, Nick remembers that her will, made at the encouragement of Mr Croft, is with Charles. Although Mr Croft claims to have posted it to him, Charles denies ever receiving a will. Poirot secretly sends Croft's fingerprints to the police. Poirot sends flowers and a card to Nick before meeting Inspector Japp in London where they discover Croft has no criminal record; but strangely, the Crofts are also unknown in Australia. He also discovers that Jim's art company is in trouble. Returning to St Loo, they find that Nick has been poisoned with cocaine but she is not dead. The cocaine was on some chocolates that came with Poirot's card, thus fooling Nick. Freddie and Jim sent the chocolates, but, of course, deny that they were laced with cocaine. Poirot is baffled by the crudity of the murder attempt. Poirot tells everyone that Nick is dead, hoping it will cause events to unfold.

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English Readers

Part 4: Chapters 18–22

A letter from Maggie's parents suggests she was due to visit Nick even before Poirot's urging. Nick's will is posted to Charles. With these facts, and the reminder that the name Margaret has many short forms, Poirot solves the case. Everyone gathers to hear Nick's will which leaves everything to Mrs Croft, but when Nick reappears, the Crofts, although nothing to do with the murder, are revealed as forgers. The gathering is disturbed by the suicide of Freddie's deranged husband whom everyone assumes is the murderer: suspect J. But Poirot explains there is another suspect, person K, who has been forgotten: he denounces Nick as the murderer. Inspector Japp describes seeing Nick hide the gun in Freddie's coat. Nick wanted Seton's fortune but he was in fact in love not with her but with Maggie. When Seton went missing, Nick decided to kill Maggie and, using their shared name - Magdala and some stolen love letters, she pretended Seton was engaged to her. She shot Maggie and hid the pistol with the intention of planting it on Freddie whom, it would be assumed, had a motive for wanting Nick dead. Poirot only became suspicious when he realised Maggie's visit was prearranged - why had Nick not mentioned this? Nick is taken away by the police but Poirot suggests that Nick will likely try to kill herself, saying rather coldly that it would be 'better than the hangman's rope'.

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Classroom Activities

Part 1 (Chapters 1–6)

Before reading

1 Language

Tell the class, if they don't already know, that the detective in this novel is the famous Poirot. Write *Hercule Poirot* on the board and elicit words that could be used for a physical description of Poirot; they may have an idea from a previous novel or a movie representation. If they do not have an idea, you can read the description in the answer key from *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, or play it if you have the audio and use it as a note-taking opportunity. Ask for the names of other famous detectives, some may be particular to their own countries but that does not matter, and ask for more descriptive words.

2 Follow-up activity

You can read the description of Poirot from *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and ask students to write a similar first-impressions description of one of the detectives they have thought of.

3 Listening

Tell the class: *This book takes place on the English coast where Poirot is staying at the Majestic Hotel.* Ask them what impressions they have of the English seaside. Read aloud the Cultural note **Cornwall**, get the students to take notes and then compare with their partners. Then ask:

- 1 Where is Cornwall?
- 2 When did it become a popular holiday destination?
- 3 What nickname did it have and what did it mean?
- 4 What is the name of the town where Poirot is staying?
- 5 On which real English town is it based?
- **6** Why do you think Agatha Christie chose this part of England?

4 Research

Ask the students to research the English Riviera. Try and get them to find pictures, past and present, and find out more about the area. Tell the students that St Loo is a made-up place, it doesn't really exist, but ask them if they can think why Christie named the town St Loo.

After reading

5 Language

Ask the students to identify these adjectives.

- **a** carefree
- **b** languid
- **c** reserved

d respectable

e egotistical

If they know them already they can explain them to the class or they can look them up in their dictionaries. Alternatively, you can give them definitions (see answers) for them to match with the words.

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English Readers

In pairs, ask them to identify a character from Part 1 whose personality fits one or two (depending on the size of your class) of the adjectives and to support their reasons with examples from the text.

6 Listening

Read aloud the Cultural note **Wills and inheritance** (p. 102) and get the students to take notes.

Read it twice if necessary and ask them to compare their notes with a partner and then contrast their notes with the printed text. Ask some comprehension questions about the passage (or these can be set before the listening if you think it will help them focus).

- **a** What happens if there is no will?
- **b** Who were the two witnesses for Nick's will?
- c Who were the beneficiaries?

Ask them if they know the formula phrases of a will, first in their own language, and then perhaps in English (see answers) and get them to compare the two.

As a **Writing** extension to this exercise, and depending on whether you feel the students will take it light-heartedly, you can get the students to write pretend wills for themselves.

7 Playing detective

For this exercise it is useful to work in groups of threes or fours, but pairs and even individual students can also do it. Ask students: *What were the three 'accidents' suffered by Nick?* Then get them to consider the 'accidents' and the shooting, and ask six or seven questions a detective such as Poirot would ask about motive, means and opportunity. Put them in groups to write these questions down and then present them to the other groups for an answer.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 2 (Chapters 7–11)

Before reading

1 Playing detective

Ask the students what they can remember from Part 1. Use these questions.

- **a** Why does Poirot say that the motive for murder can't be obvious?
- **b** Why does Poirot suspect Freddie Rice?
- **c** Who is Poirot talking about and what does he mean when he says 'They were, perhaps, just a bit too typical'?
- d DidVyse have an alibi for Saturday afternoon?
- e Why does Poirot suspect someone in the house?

2 Speaking

Ask the students who is the narrator of the story (Hastings). Ask them to read the description of Hastings in the Character list (p. 101). Ask them what they think of his character and if it comes across in his narration.

Somewhere in the story Poirot will describe him as 'Most faithful friend!' How do you think he reacts to Poirot's remarks?

After reading

3 Comprehension

Put the students in pairs and get them to order the events in the story as they happened in Chapter 7. One fact is wrong; ask them to correct it.

Challenger	Mr and Mrs	The	Nick goes to
arrives at the	Croft arrive	fireworks	get her fur
party	at the party	begin	coat
Nick gets a telephone call	Maggie is found dead	Poirot meets Maggie	Maggie goes to get her coat

4 Playing detective

In Chapter 9 Poirot makes a list of his suspects A-J. Look at the notes and decide which five suspects he is talking about from his list.

Suspect A: Ellen, the housekeeper Suspect B: Ellen's husband Suspect C: Ellen's son Suspect D: Mr Croft Suspect E: Mrs Croft Suspect F: Mrs Rice Suspect G: Mr Lazarus Suspect H: Commander Challenger Suspect I: Mr Vyse Suspect J: a person unknown

accidents – good opportunity; but arrived after murder	
suspicious in the house; secret past? but no motive	
no alibi – Saturday afternoon; Nick's love of End House? Probably knew about pistol. Motive – love/hate? Investigate money!	
asked Nick for coat; called Nick a liar; lied about Tavistock. Motive – jealousy? Investigate marriage!	
attitude suspicious; accidents – best opportunity; might have known about the pistol; but not very clever and no motive. Investigate!	

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Ask the students what they think of the idea of suspect J? Do you think there could be another person in the story?

5 Language

Ask the students to scan the text for Hastings' description of Nick's shawl, and also what Maggie was wearing at the party (you can talk about how they reflect their personalities if you like). Focus on the order of adjectives ('beautiful old Chinese shawl' and 'simple, well-worn, black evening dress') and ask students if they can say what order they should be in. Depending on their knowledge they can do this **either** by deducing from examples **or** you could give some of the answers and get them to fill in the rest.

Size
Nationality
Shape
Age
Opinion
Material
Colour

Tell the students that it is unusual to have more than a string of three adjectives in a description and returning to the Hastings' descriptions, ask the students how Agatha Christie adds to the descriptions (<u>'in a</u> deep, glowing red' and <u>'and had</u> honest blue eyes'). Ask the students to look around the room and describe objects and people in the same way Christie does.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 3 (Chapters 12–17)

Before reading

1 Listening

Remind the students that at the end of Chapter 10, Nick reveals that she was engaged to Michael Seton. Then play the audio for Chapter 11 (which they will already have read) and ask the students to take notes and compare with a partner. Ask these questions:

a How did she hear about Michael's death?

- **b** Did she really get a telephone call?
- \boldsymbol{c} Where did they meet?
- **d** When did they become engaged?
- e Who else knew about the engagement?
- f Where is Nick's will?

Ask the students if any of this information changes their view of the case. Who might be guilty now?

2 Speaking

Ask the students: Can you remember the name of the local St Loo newspaper? How do you think they would have reported the death of Maggie? Would they have taken a special interest because it was in the big house? Or because the famous Hercule Poirot was involved? Would they have sent a special reporter? What questions would they have asked?

3 Writing

Tell the students to work in pairs or groups to write a front page EXCLUSIVE story for the *Weekly Herald and Directory* about Maggie's death. Get them to include all the detail that would be public knowledge (e.g. family history, names, etc.) and information that they may have gathered from asking questions (*a police source has told the paper..., a friend of the family said ...*). Students can then go on to design the page and a mock up.

After reading

4 Listening

Read aloud the Cultural note on **The structure of the police in England** (p. 102) and ask the students to take notes.

- **a** When was the British force created and by whom?
- **b** What is the lowest ranking position and what is the highest?
- **c** What rank of policeman attends the crime scene at End House?
- d What is the name of the headquarters of the British police?

5 Speaking

Ask the students: What role do the police play in the story? Which policemen do we meet? Where do they appear and what effect do they

have on the narrative? Ask the students to look at the pages where the police appear in Part 3 and to talk about the characters of the policemen that Christie portrays.

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English Readers

6 Playing detective

In Part 3, the students learnt a series of new facts, some of which are below. Get them to work in pairs and decide the significance of each.

New fact	What might it mean?
There's a sliding panel somewhere in End House	
The content of the love letters from Seton	
Part of a suspicious note is found in the garden	
Charles claims never to have received a will from Nick	
The Crofts are not known in Australia	
Jim's company is in financial trouble	
The murder attempt was crude and blatant – not like the other attempts	

7 Follow-up activity

Ask students: What other clues have you identified in Part 3?

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 4 (Chapters 18–22)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Remind the students that at the end of Part 3 Poirot has decided to arrange a deceit by telling everybody that Nick is dead. Ask them why he does this. Ask them what they think of this method of detection and whether it is realistic. Remind them of something Nick said at the beginning of the story: 'I love End House. I've always wanted to put on a play there. It's got an atmosphere of drama about it.' Then ask them to read the first paragraphs of Chapter 18 from I was unfortunate enough to ... until The old and useless are left. Get them to find more references to theatre. Ask them what they think might happen in the last part of the book.

2 Listening

Read aloud the Cultural note on **Spiritualism** (p. 104) and ask the students to listen for a word or expression meaning: **a** a period of time

- **b** someone who claims to communicate with the dead
- **c** a spiritualist's meeting
- d deceit

e a close family member.

Ask the students if an interest in spiritualism still exists today and whether they regard mediums as fraudsters or do they believe it is possible that you can 'contact' the dead.

After reading

3 Comprehension

Put the students in pairs and ask them to consider the questions below.

- 1 Why does Nick's will leave everything to Mrs Croft?
- 2 Who poisoned Nick's chocolates in the nursing home?
- 3 What crime has Commander Challenger committed?
- 4 Where did Nick hide the gun before she put it in Freddie's pocket?
- **5** Who wrote the note that Chief Constable Weston found in the garden?

4 Language

Ask students the form of the past participle and get them to explain why it might be useful for Poirot when he is talking about how he solved the case. Copy the table below and cut up the individual phrases. These are all statements made by Poirot in Part 4 of the book. Give half a phrase to each member of the class and tell them to mingle to find their partner.

Michael and Nick had	been seen together at Le Touquet and Scarborough.
Maggie had	been coming to stay on Tuesday anyway.
Nick had	had an operation for appendicitis on February 27 th last.
Hastings had	said that there were plenty of short names for Margaret.
Mr Croft had	destroyed Nick's will.
Jim Lazarus had	offered fifty pounds for the painting.

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English Readers

With smaller groups you can reduce the number of phrases used, or play the game twice. With very small groups of two to five, you may want to give the whole cut-up table to pairs and ask them to reconstruct it.

5 Follow-up activity

Ask students to explain the significance of their phrase for the solving of the mystery and decide which pair has the phrase which has no significance in solving the mystery. Then ask the students which pair has a passive form of the structure and which pair has the continuous form.

6 Speaking

Create a board game by asking the students to write aspects of the story on pieces of card. Suggest things like:

secret	the English	Hastings	sexism	malaria	
romances	Riviera				

Get about thirty squares and stick them in a board game formation (circle or square) onto a large sheet of paper with a START and FINISH line. Students roll a die and have to talk about that aspect of the story for one or two minutes. These are very general aspects but it is also possible to include some more specific questions such as *Why did Freddie lie about being in Tavistock? Why did Michael Seton hide his romance from his father?*, although not too many as they tend to lead to shorter comprehension-only answers.

7 Writing

At the end of the story Poirot says that he believes Nick will try to kill herself and says callously '*It is the best way. Better than the hangman's rope* ...' Immediately, Charles leaves the room. Can you think why? Is it love? Perhaps he is going to prevent it happening and perhaps he will act as her lawyer in her defence. How do you think he will defend her? Write a defence for Nick that you could present at her trial. Think about her past, her family, her friends. What could you say to save her life?

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ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

Part 1 (Chapters 1–6)

1 Language

The description of Poirot from *The Mysterious Affair at Styles:*

He was hardly more than five feet four inches but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military. Even if everything on his face was covered, the tips of moustache and the pink-tipped nose would be visible.

The neatness of his attire was almost incredible; I believe a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound. Yet this quaint dandified little man who, I was sorry to see, now limped badly, had been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police. Other answers will vary.

2 Follow-up activity

Answers will vary.

3 Listening

- 1 The south-west of Britain.
- **2** Victorian era (the second half of the 19th century).
- **3** The 'English Riviera' comparing it to the French Riviera.
- 4 St Loo.
- 5 Torquay.
- 6 She was born there and loved it. Also she might have thought it a good place to set a murder mystery amongst the English upper classes.

4 Research

St Loo is a made-up place, but Christie may have also been thinking of the town Looe in Cornwall and of all the other towns in Cornwall with saints' names (St Mawes, St Ives, St Just) and of the French town Saint-Lô across the English Channel.

5 Language

Answers will vary. Suggestions: (See bottom of this page)

6 Listening

- **a** The closest relative will usually inherit everything.
- **b** The servant Ellen and her husband.

c Charles Vyse will get the house and everything else will go to Freddie Rice.
In English the formula phrases from a will are: This is of the last will and testament of ..., being of sound mind and body...., I leave all my worldly goods to ... Other answers will vary.

7 Playing detective

The accidents were a falling picture in Nick's bedroom, a rockfall on a cliff walk, and damaged brakes on her car. *Suggested questions:* Who had a motive to kill Nick? Who could have pushed the rock down the hill? Who could have damaged the car? Who could have made the picture fall? Who could have taken the gun? Who had access to the house? Who could have been at the garden of the Majestic Hotel on Saturday afternoon? was fired?"The murderer has to make it look like an accident.'

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English Readers

- **b** Because she calls Nick a liar. Is she afraid of something that Nick may say?
- c Maybe he thinks <u>the Crofts</u> might be fakes?d No. Poirot looked in his calendar when he
- left the office.
 e Because they would have had access to the gun, the painting and because they may be the person who was looking at something other than the tide information in the paper at End House Nick says she only reads the information about the tides.

2 Speaking

Answers will vary.

3 Comprehension

- 1 Poirot meets Maggie.
- 2 Nick gets a telephone call.
- 3 The fireworks begin.
- 4 Mr and Mrs Croft arrive at the party Mr Croft arrives at the party.
- 5 Maggie goes to get her coat.
- 6 Nick goes to get her fur coat.
- 7 Maggie is found dead.
- 8 Challenger arrives at the party.

Part 2 (Chapter 7–11)

1 Playing detective

a Because if they were, Poirot says 'People would say, "Where was X when the shot

a carefree – be without worry or anxiety	Nick	 p. 11: 'Mademoiselle, what if someone is trying to kill you?' Nick laughed. 'My dear man, who on earth do you think would try to kill <i>me</i>? I wish somebody <i>was</i> trying to kill me – that would be exciting,' p. 14: She still tried to behave as though she wasn't too worried, because it was her habit,
b languid – avoiding physical exertion or effort; slow and relaxed	Freddie	p. 8: She seemed to me the most tired person I had ever met. Tired in mind, as though she had found everything in the world to be empty and valueless.p. 25: Frederica Rice, in white, danced with an exhaustion that was the opposite of Nick's energy.
c reserved – formal in behaviour, silent and reticent	Commander Challenger or Hastings	 p. 4: ' I have great admiration for the English Navy.' This type of comment is not typical for an Englishman. Commander Challenger's face went even redder. p. 12: Hastings: 'That is now unnecessary,' I said coldly. 'You have told her yourself.'
d respectable – exhibiting good, proper or conventional conduct	Hastings	 p. 8: 'Miss Buckley very kindly helped my friend when he twisted his ankle this morning,' I explained as I accepted her offer. She looked at me thoughtfully. 'Nothing wrong with his ankle now, is there?' I felt myself turning pink.
e egotistical – showing an overblown sense of self-worth, of one's own importance	Poirot	p. 12: 'Say to Mademoiselle that I am a <i>detective unique</i> , the greatest that ever lived!' p. 21: 'To find a murderer after a crime has been committed – that is simple! Or it is to someone of my ability.'

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4 Playing detective

accidents – good opportunity; but arrived after murder	H: Commander Challenger
suspicious in the house; secret past? but no motive	D: Mr Croft
no alibi – Saturday afternoon; Nick's love of End House? Probably knew about pistol. Motive – love/ hate? Investigate money!	l: Mr Vyse
asked Nick for coat; called Nick a liar; lied about Tavistock. Motive – jealousy? Investigate marriage!	F: Mrs Rice
attitude suspicious; accidents – best opportunity; might have known about the pistol; but not very clever and no motive. Investigate!	A: Ellen

5 Language

Hastings describes Nick as wearing a 'beautiful old Chinese shawl in a deep, glowing red', and Maggie as wearing a 'simple, well-worn, black evening dress' and having 'honest blue eyes.'

1	2	3	4
Opinion	Size	Shape	Age
5	6	7	
Colour	Nationality	Material	

Part 3 (Chapters 12-17)

1 Listening

- **a** On the radio.
- b No.
- c Le Touquet.
- **d** Just after Christmas.
- e Nick says she never told anyone but she says Freddie may have guessed. She also says she might have given a clue to someone else and Poirot seems to think it was Charles Vyse.
- **f** Somewhere in End House the library or the bedroom.
- Other answers may vary.

2 Speaking

The local paper is called the St Loo Weekly Herald and Directory (p. 10). Other answers may vary.

3 Writing

Answers will vary.

4 Listening

a 1829 by Sir Robert Peel, the Home Secretary.

- **b** Police Constable (lowest), and Chief Superintendent (highest)
- c A mid-ranking inspector.
- d Scotland Yard.

5 Speaking

p. 38-39: The inspector arrives and asks Nick to tell her version of the story.
p. 64: The chief constable gives Poirot a suspicious note that was found in the grounds of End House and provides Poirot with a letter that introduces him to Seton's lawyer (p. 69).
p. 70-71: Inspector Japp tells Poirot that the Crofts have no criminal record but are unknown in Australia.
Other answers will vary.

6 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

7 Follow-up activity *Answers may vary.*

Part 4 (Chapters 18-22)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary. Poirot tells Hastings, The play that I am putting on – you would not act as well as I do. And he uses the expression What a comedy. He also reports Freddie saying What a tragedy.

2 Listening

- **a** era
- **b** medium
- **c** séance **d** trickery
- e a loved one

3 Comprehension

- 1 It says because she helped Nick's father when he was in Australia but the real reason is that it is a forgery.
- 2 She did it herself.
- 3 Drug dealing.
- 4 In the sliding panel.
- 5 Freddie's deranged husband.

4 Language

Past perfect [had + past participle]. Poirot uses it because it expresses the idea of something occurring before another event also in the past, so it allows him to relate a sequence of events and consequences.

- 1 Michael and Nick had been seen together at Le Touquet and Scarborough.
- 2 Maggie had been coming to stay on Tuesday anyway.
- **3** Nick had had an operation for appendicitis on February 27th last.
- 4 Hastings had said that there were plenty of short names for Margaret.

- 5 Mr Croft had destroyed Nick's will.
- **6** Jim Lazarus had offered fifty pounds for the painting.

5 Follow-up activity

- **1** Poirot realized there must be a relationship between Michael and Nick.
- 2 Poirot realized that Nick was being deceitful.
- **3** Poirot wondered why Seton would not have mentioned it in her letters.
- 4 Poirot realized that Nick's name was Magdala.
- 5 Nick didn't know so she still thought Freddie would be seen as having a motive for killing her.
- 6 This was Jim's trick but it has no significance in solving the mystery.
- 1 had been seen the passive form
- 2 had been seeing the continuous form

6 Speaking

Answers will vary.

7 Writing

Answers will vary.

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