

The Witness for the Prosecution and other stories

Agatha Christie

SUMMARIES

The Witness for the Prosecution

Leonard Vole has been charged with the murder of the rich, elderly Miss Emily French. Miss French's maid, Janet Mackenzie, says that her mistress wanted to marry Vole but he just wanted her money. Mr Mayherne is the lawyer for the defence. He believes his client is innocent. Leonard's alibi is his wife, Romaine. But will the testimony of a loving wife convince the jury? Romaine surprises Mayherne when she tells him that not only is she not actually married to Leonard but she also hates him. She plans to be a witness for the prosecution and tell the jury Leonard killed Miss French. Things look bad for Leonard until Mayherne receives an anonymous letter. He meets the sender – a disgusting middle-aged woman with a scar on her face. She has letters that prove Romaine is having an affair with a man called Max and that she is planning to lie in court to see Leonard hang. In court, everyone believes Romaine until the defence lawyer produces the letters. Leonard is acquitted. Mr Mayherne realizes that Romaine played with her hands in court in the same way as the woman who gave him the letters. It was Romaine in disguise. Romaine says she knew no one would believe Leonard's wife if she said he was innocent, but if they thought she hated him and had lied, they would think he must be. Mayherne says he is sure he could have proved Leonard's innocence another way. Romaine says the problem was that Leonard was in fact guilty and she loves him and couldn't let him hang.

The Rajah's Emerald

The Rajah of Maraputna's emerald has been stolen from Lord Campion's house. James Fleming is on holiday with girlfriend, Grace. But Grace has gone to stay in a fancy hotel with some rich friends, Claud Sopworth and his sisters, leaving James in an average boarding house on his own. Grace has changed and no longer likes the way James dresses or how undynamic he is. When they meet to go swimming, Grace and the Sopworths go to change in the hotel's private changing huts sending James off to the grotty public ones. Annoyed by the long queue and desperate to get Grace away from Claud, James sneaks into Lord Campion's private beach hut to change. When he is dressing after his swim, he hears someone coming. In his hurry to get out he puts on the wrong trousers. At lunch, he finds the missing emerald in his trouser pocket. When James tries to put the trousers and the emerald back, he is discovered by Detective Inspector Merrilees. When Merrilees shows him a 'police' badge that happens to be the same as a badge James has, he realises this must be the thief. He tells Merrilees the emerald is at his boarding house and offers to take him there. As they pass the police station, James slips the emerald into Merrilees' pocket and shouts for the police. Lord Campion arrives and recognises Merrilees as his driver, Jones. Lord Campion invites James to lunch. En route, they pass Grace who is astonished that James is going to lunch with someone so rich and famous.

Philomel Cottage

For eleven years Alix has been hoping colleague Dick Windyford will ask her to marry him, but he feels he hasn't got enough money. Alix inherits some money, but Dick seems unwilling to marry a woman of means. Alix meets Gerald Martin and within a week he proposes. When the story begins Alix and Gerald have been married for a month and have used Alix's inheritance to buy picture-postcard Philomel Cottage in the middle of the countryside. Alix is disturbed by a recurring dream in which Dick kills Gerald and she is grateful. Alix is flustered when Dick calls to say he is in the village. Then, George the gardener tells her that Gerald told him that he and Alix were going to London and didn't know when they would be back. He also tells Alix that the price of the cottage was £1,000 less than Gerald told her it was. Alix finds Gerald's diary and sees an entry for that evening at 9 pm – she thinks he might be seeing another woman. When she asks, Gerald says he has planned for them to develop some photos in the cellar at 9 pm. When she tells him what George told her he changes his mind about the photos. Unconvinced, Alix decides to search his things. She finds a newspaper article about Charles Lemaitre, who killed his wives for their money. It says that he has a weak heart. The photo reminds her of Gerald, and Lemaitre has a mole on his left wrist where Gerald has a scar. She convinces herself that Gerald is Lemaitre. When Gerald comes home with a new spade she assumes he is going to kill her that evening. Alix pretends to call the butcher but instead phones Dick. Gerald listens to her conversation so whilst talking about steaks she cleverly uses the mute button to deliver her real message to Dick telling him to come at once. To distract Gerald she invents a story about how she killed two previous husbands with poison. Gerald thinks she has poisoned him too. When Dick arrives with a policeman, Gerald is dead in his chair – he's had a heart attack.

The Actress

Jake Levitt sees an opportunity to make some quick money when he recognises famous actress Olga Stormer as Nancy Taylor – a girl who killed a man. He sends Olga a blackmail letter. She knows that if she pays him, he'll ask for more money and if she doesn't, he will tell the papers and ruin both her career and that of her important MP fiancée. So she invites him to her home the following evening. She stages a murder, using her understudy Margaret Ryan. She places, 'the body' under her curtains. Levitt believes Olga has killed Margaret and is trying to frame him for the murder. Olga appears disguised as a 'maid'. Levitt runs away hoping to leave the country before the 'maid' calls the police and they can find him.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The Witness for the Prosecution

Before reading

1 Research

Write *The Witness for the Prosecution* on the board. Elicit the term *title*. Ask students to research the meanings of ‘*witness*’ and ‘*prosecution*’.

They could use the internet, dictionaries, the Cultural notes on page 80 and the Glossary on pages 86 and 88, both at the back of the book.

Ask students to predict what the story might be about, i.e. a court case and one of the people who is going to give evidence against the charged person.

2 Language

Other terms you might like to ask students to find definitions for and to discuss before reading could include:

lawyer client innocent guilty court jury
trial evidence

3 Listening

Explain that the story begins with two men having a conversation. Write the names *Leonard Vole* and *Mr Mayherne* on the board. Play track one from the beginning to ‘*I just can’t believe that I’m charged with murder.*’

Ask students *Which man is the lawyer and which is the client? What crime is the client charged with?* Make sure students understand that Mr Mayherne’s job as Leonard Vole’s lawyer is to prove his innocence in court whether the evidence suggests he is innocent or not.

After reading

4 Comprehension

Read the following statements and ask students to say if they are true or false. Ask them to correct the false ones. You could play this in teams, giving teams alternate statements.

- 1 Mr Mayherne believes that Leonard Vole is innocent.
- 2 Leonard Vole first met Emily French at his friend’s party.
- 3 Leonard Vole never knew that Emily French was rich.
- 4 Emily French asked Leonard to help her with her investments.
- 5 Leonard Vole swindled Emily French.
- 6 Emily French left money to Leonard Vole in her will.
- 7 Leonard Vole says he didn’t know Emily French was leaving him any money in her will.
- 8 Leonard Vole killed Emily French because he needed the money she was leaving him in her will.
- 9 Leonard and Romaine weren’t married.
- 10 Leonard and Romaine were in love.

11 Mr Mayherne doesn’t know who the letter is from when it arrives.

12 The woman in Shaw’s Rents was Romaine’s sister.

13 Romaine used to be a singer.

14 Romaine knew her husband was innocent.

15 Romaine knew that the jury would not believe her if she said she loved her husband – they would think she was trying to protect him.

16 Mr Mayherne realised Romaine was lying when she coughed in the same way as the woman in Shaw’s Rents.

5 Speaking

Ask students *Were you surprised to learn that Leonard Vole was actually guilty?* Ask them to scan back through the story and find facts that suggest he could be guilty.

Ask *Do you think Romaine and Leonard’s plan was a good one? Why? Did it work?* Ask *Why do you think Agatha Christie called this story The Witness for the Prosecution? In your opinion, is it a good title? Why or why not?*

6 Language

Write the following line from page 22 on the board:

She had seemed like a tropical flower in an English garden.

Explain that this is a simile. Similes are used to describe something or someone by comparing them to something else. They contain the words *like* or *as*. Ask students what they think of when they think of a tropical flower (they may mention bright colours or strong smells or large flowers) and when they imagine an English garden (they may say paler colours, smaller flowers/plants, etc).

Ask students in pairs to try to write another simile to describe how Romaine appeared in court, or one to describe how she appeared the first time Mr Mayherne met her or as the woman in Shaw’s Rents.

7 Writing

Ask students to write a short article for a local newspaper about what happened in court. Encourage them to look back through the story to find descriptions of both the lawyers, the client and the two witnesses for the prosecution.

Brainstorm elements to include, for example:

- Description of the crime
- Description of the charged man
- Reasons for public interest in the case
- Sir Charles’ questioning of Janet Mackenzie
- Romaine Heilger’s testimony and the jury’s reaction
- Sir Charles’ questioning of Romaine Heilger and the subsequent jury reaction
- Verdict
- Writer’s own opinion on the proceedings.

You may like to suggest a suitable word length.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The Rajah's Emerald

Before reading

1 Guess

Write *The Rajah's Emerald* on the board. Elicit the term title.

Ask students to research the meanings of 'Rajah' and 'emerald'.

They could use the internet, dictionaries and the Glossary on pages 84 and 86 at the back of the book.

You could show images of Rajah's from the 1930s and/or large emeralds or other jewels.

Ask students *What do you imagine might happen to the Rajah's emerald in the story?* They will most probably guess that it will be stolen.

2 Research

Write *Kimpton-on-Sea* on the board. Explain that this is where the story is set. Tell them it is described in the story as '*A resort for the rich and fashionable*'.

Ask students to research popular British seaside resorts in the early 1900s. Say *Can you find out who visited, where they stayed and what they did there?*

Students could use the internet or books.

Ask students to find some images to share with the class.

Discuss if students can think of similar resorts today (i.e. Monte Carlo, Dubai, Cannes, etc.) or have or had similar seaside resorts in their own countries.

3 Language

Explain that the main character is called James Fleming and that he is on holiday in Kimpton-on-Sea with his girlfriend, Grace, but he is not very happy. Read the paragraph:

*She had been very pleased when he first noticed her.
That was before she had been promoted at work. In those early days it had been James who felt important; now, the shoe was on the other foot.*

Check comprehension of 'promoted'. Ask students to guess what the phrase '*the shoe was on the other foot*' means from the context. Discuss any suggestions. Ask them to check in the Glossary on page 88.

4 Guess

Ask *How do you think James or Grace might be involved with the Rajah's emerald?* Do not confirm or reject any suggestions at this point.

After reading

5 Speaking

Discuss students' guesses in activities 1 and 4. Who guessed correctly?

6 Comprehension

Brainstorm the main characters' names and write them on the board.

- James Fleming
- Lord Campion
- The Rajah of Marapatna
- Claud Sopworth
- Grace
- Merrilees

Divide the class into two or three teams. Give them three minutes to discuss what they can remember about each character and to make notes. They can refer to the reader if they like. At the end of three minutes make sure all teams stop discussing and writing. Decide which team will go first. This team chooses one of the characters and gives one piece of information about him or her, e.g. James Fleming – is on holiday in Kimpton-on-Sea. If the information is incorrect the team is out of the round. The next team adds a further piece of information. Keep going around the teams until either no teams are left in the round or no one can add any further information. Whichever team is the last to say a correct fact wins the round and can choose the character for the next round.

7 Comprehension

In pairs or small groups, ask students to write true and false statements about the story. Each pair or group should write six in total. Check statements and make sure all true ones are correct and all false ones are incorrect. Put pairs or groups together to read their statements to each other. They try and say if the other group's statements are true or false and correct the false ones. Optional: allocate the first half of the story to one group and the second half of the story to the other.

8 Writing

Ask students to write a short article for a local newspaper with the title: *Dynamic man on holiday catches emerald thief*. Suggest a suitable word length.

9 Grammar

Focus students on the first paragraph on page 37. Ask them to find all the verbs. Ask them to name the tenses and what they are used for in this extract. You could get students to draw timelines to show when each of the events happened.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Philomel Cottage

Before reading

1 Research

Write *Philomel Cottage* on the board. Elicit the term *title*. Ask students to research the meaning of 'Philomel'. Check comprehension of 'cottage'.

They could use the internet, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and the Cultural note on page 81 at the back of the book.

You could show an image of a nightingale and find audio online of a nightingale's song to play the class.

Show students an image of a quintessentially English cottage complete with thatched roof, front garden path and garden gate if possible. Ask students *Have you ever seen houses like these? Are they in the town or in the countryside? Do you like them? Would you like to live in one? Why or why not?*

2 Listening

Write the following questions on the board:

- 1 How long has Alix known Dick?
- 2 How long had Alix known Gerald before they got engaged?
- 3 How long have Alix and Gerald been married?
- 4 How many times has Alix had the same dream?
- 5 Who kills who in Alix's dream?
- 6 How does Alix feel about the murder?

Say *Listen and answer the questions*. Play the audio from the beginning of the story on page 47 to 'Dick Windyford's arms' at the top of page 49. Check answers.

Introduce the phrase 'second thoughts'. Explain that it describes when you think you may have made the wrong decision. Ask *Do you think Alix is having second thoughts about marrying Gerald?*

After reading

3 Comprehension

Photocopy or write the following sentences on strips of paper. Hand the strips out randomly one per student. If you have fewer than 16 students in the class, hand out the first eight, then repeat the activity with the second half. Say *Arrange yourselves in a line to show the order the events happened in the story*. Once they are in a line ask each person in turn to read out the sentence on their paper.

Dick Windyford calls Alix and asks to visit.
George, the gardener, comes on the wrong day.
George tells Alix Gerald said they were going to London.
George tells Alix that Gerald bought the house for only two thousand pounds.
Alix finds Gerald's diary. There is an entry for 9 pm that evening.

Alix tells Gerald that she told George they weren't going to London.
Gerald changes his mind about developing the photos that evening.
Alix searches Gerald's things.
Alix finds a newspaper article about Charles Lemaitre.
Alix thinks Gerald is planning to kill her.
Alix tries to leave the house but Gerald stops her.
Alix pretends to phone the butcher but actually phones Dick Windyford.
Alix pretends she has poisoned two previous husbands.
Gerald thinks Alix has poisoned him.
Dick arrives with a policeman.
Gerald has a heart attack and dies.

4 Comprehension

Divide the class into pairs. Photocopy and hand out the following photos to each pair. Tell them to place them face down in a pile WITHOUT looking at them first. Student A looks at the top photo without showing it to student B. They say how the object appeared in the story in order for their partner to guess what the image shows. They cannot say the name of the object. When student B has guessed correctly, it is their turn to describe the next photo. You could allow each pair to have one 'pass'. This card gets placed at the bottom of the pile and will then be described by the other student in the pair when it next appears. The game finishes when all the cards have been described and named.

A 	D 
B 	E 
C 	

5 Speaking

Discuss the following questions with the class:

- *Do you think Gerald was Lemaitre? Why/Why not?*
- *Do you think Alix was clever? Why/Why not?*

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The Actress

Before reading

1 Research

Write 'blackmail' on the board. Explain that in this story, someone tries to blackmail a famous actress. Ask students to research what blackmail is.

They could use the internet or dictionaries.

2 Writing

Say *Imagine you know something about a person, something they have done and now you want to blackmail them. In the story we are about to read, the blackmailer sends a letter to the person they want to blackmail. Write your own short blackmail letter.*

Suggest a suitable word length.

You could also do this as a whole class activity, composing one blackmail letter on the board together, or in smaller groups.

After reading

3 Comprehension

Ask the class:

- 1 Why did Olga Stormer change her name?
- 2 What did James Levitt want from Olga Stormer?
- 3 How did Olga and Levitt communicate?
- 4 What does Olga think will happen if she gives Levitt some money?
- 5 What does Olga think will happen if Levitt tells the newspaper?
- 6 Why does Olga need Margaret Ryan to help her?
- 7 Why does Olga ask Danahan to get her some strong sleeping pills?
- 8 Why does Levitt panic when the maid comes in?
- 9 Why does Olga say 'oh Danny – I'm an actress' at the end of the story?

4 Writing

Compare students' own blackmail letters from activity 2 with the one Levitt sends Olga on page 70 (see copy here).

Ask:

- 1 Does he mention what he knows about Nancy?
- 2 What does he suggest he will do with the information?
- 3 If Olga took this letter to the police, would they be able to accuse Levitt of blackmail? Why not?
- 4 How is Olga's response on page 73 similar (see copy here)?
- 5 What are the differences between your blackmail letter and Levitt's?

Dear Miss Stormer,

I enjoyed your theatre performance last night. I believe that we both know Miss Nancy Taylor. An article about her is going to be published very soon. If you would like to discuss this article with me, I could visit you at any time.

Yours,
Jake Levitt

Dear Mr Levitt,

I do not remember the lady you mention, but I meet so many people that my memory is not always perfect. I am always pleased to help any actress, and I will be at home if you would like to visit me this evening at nine o'clock.

Yours,
Olga Stormer

5 Language

Read the following passage from page 76 to the class.

Ask them to spot the two conditional phrases:

He quickly made a plan. He would go to Gravesend as quickly as possible. A boat was sailing from there that night going far away. If he gave the men working on the boat some money, they wouldn't ask any questions. He would be safe as soon as he was out at sea.

Ask *What are the two conditional sentences?* (If he gave the men on the boat some money, they wouldn't ask any questions. / He would be safe as soon as he was out at sea.)

Elicit that the first is a second conditional. Focus students on the second example and elicit that there is no *If* clause. Explain that sometimes we can replace *If* with *when* or *as soon as*. Ask *Does Levitt know that he will be safe when he is out at sea?* (Yes.) *So, this conditional is based on his knowledge and for him it is a fact. If we replace If in the first example with When or As soon as how does the meaning change?* It goes from being imagined to being a fact based on knowledge.

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ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

The Witness for the Prosecution

1 Research

See glossary.

2 Language

See glossary.

3 Listening

Mr Mayherne is the lawyer and Leonard Vole is his client. He is charged with murder.

4 Comprehension

- 1 T
- 2 F – He met her in the street when she had dropped some parcels that he picked up for her.
- 3 F – His friend told him at the party.
- 4 T
- 5 F – He didn't.
- 6 T
- 7 T
- 8 T
- 9 F – Yes, they were. Romaine pretended they weren't so that she could give evidence in court for the prosecution.
- 10 T
- 11 T
- 12 F – It was Romaine in disguise.
- 13 F – She used to be an actress.
- 14 F – She knew her husband was guilty.
- 15 T
- 16 F – He realised she was lying when she played with her hands in the same way.

5 Speaking

Answers will vary. Facts that indicate Leonard Vole's guilt include:

- He knew Emily French was rich – pages 4/5
- He needed money – page 5
- He says she asked him for help with her investments, but Janet Mackenzie and the bank manager both say she was a good businesswoman – page 6
- She changed her will to leave him most of her money and Janet Mackenzie says he knew this – page 8
- He never took his wife to meet Emily French and he let her believe they were separated – pages 10/11.

6 Language

Answers will vary.

7 Writing

Answers will vary.

The Rajah's Emerald

1 Guess

Answers will vary.

2 Research

Answers will vary.

3 Language

See glossary on page 88.

'promoted' means to be given a more important position at work.

4 Guess

Answers will vary.

5 Speaking

Answers will vary.

6 Comprehension

Sample answers:

James Fleming:

- On holiday in Kimpton-on-Sea
- Has a girlfriend called Grace
- Isn't very wealthy
- Staying in a boarding house
- Thinks he should be more dynamic
- Wears old comfortable trousers
- Reads self-help books
- Is annoyed with Grace
- Isn't having a nice holiday
- Uses someone else's beach hut
- Finds a stolen emerald
- Catches the thief
- Goes to lunch with Lord Campion
- Is a member of the Merton Park Super Cycling Club

Lord Campion

- Very rich
- Famous sportsman
- Owns Mon Desir beach hut
- Wears old grey trousers
- Is friends with the Rajah of Marapatna
- Invites James to lunch

The Rajah of Marapatna

- Very rich
- Has lots of palaces
- Friends with Lord Campion
- Staying in Kimpton-on-sea
- Owns a large emerald

Claud Sopworth

- Quite rich
- Well dressed
- Has three sisters
- Friends with Grace
- Not friends with James

Grace

- Friends with the Sopworths
- Can't swim
- Is James' girlfriend
- Got promoted at work
- Thinks James looks too scruffy
- Staying in a hotel

Merrilees

- Pretends to be a policeman
- Is actually Lord Campion's driver
- Stole the Rajah's emerald
- Well-dressed
- About 40
- Is a member of the Merton Park Super Cycling Club

7 Comprehension

Answers will vary.

8 Writing

Answers will vary.

9 Grammar

past simple – describing what James does;
present simple – newspaper headline;
past perfect – reporting the events in the newspaper article;
past perfect passive – when talking about the police being called;
present progressive – talking about what the police are currently doing

Philomel Cottage

1 Research

See cultural notes.

2 Listening

- 1 11 years
- 2 1 week
- 3 1 month
- 4 3
- 5 Dick kills Gerald.
- 6 She is glad – she thanks Dick.

3 Comprehension

See order of sentences in activity notes.

4 Comprehension

- A: Spade** – Gerald brings the spade home just after Alix concludes that he is the murderer Charles Lemaitre. It convinces Alix that Gerald intends to kill her.
- B: Diary** – When Alix finds Gerald's diary and sees the entry for that evening at 9 pm with no description

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ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

next to it, she starts to suspect that Gerald has a secret. This makes her search his things.

- C: Coffee** – Alix invents a story about how she has poisoned two previous husbands by putting poison in their coffee. Gerald says the coffee tasted different that evening and so he concludes that Alix has also poisoned him. The fear leads to a heart attack and he dies.
- D: Phone** – Alix uses the phone to send a cryptic message to Dick. She pretends to call the butcher but really calls Dick, she uses the mute button to cleverly tell Dick she needs him while Gerald listens.
- E: Newspaper** – Alix finds a newspaper article in Gerald's things. It is about the court case of Charles Lemaitre, a famous swindler, bigamist and murderer, who escaped from prison. The photo reminds Alix of Gerald. Then she reads that Lemaitre had a mole on his left wrist where Gerald has a scar – she decides this must be where he had the mole removed. It also tells her that Lemaitre had a weak heart.

5 Speaking

Sample answers:

- *Do you think Gerald was Lemaitre? Why/Why not?* Students might mention that it is odd he had the article about Lemaitre; that it is an unlikely coincidence that Gerald's scar is where Lemaitre's mole was; that Alix knows nothing about her husband's past; that Alix thinks Lemaitre resembles Gerald; that if George is correct then Gerald pretended he and Alix were leaving for London when they had no such plan; Gerald may or may not have lied about the price of the house; Alix had money so he may have married her for it; why didn't he write *developing photographs* next to the 9 pm diary entry?; that his heart was also weak as he had a heart attack when he thought he'd been poisoned. OR they might say Alix was clearly having second thoughts about her marriage as obvious in her dream and that she imagined the resemblance to Lemaitre and her imagination ran away with her; that George the gardener misunderstood what Gerald told him about going to London and about the price of the house; that Gerald wouldn't let Alix go into the village by herself because he knew Dick

Windyford was there and thought she might be going to meet him.

- *Do you think Alix was clever? Why/Why not?* Students might mention how she uses the mute button on the phone to send a message to Dick and how she invents a story to hold Gerald's interest in the hope it will buy her enough time for Dick to arrive. OR they may say she is silly because she lets her imagination run away with her and jumps to ridiculous conclusions.

- 4 She doesn't admit that she knows what he is talking about or mention blackmail or money either.
- 5 *Answers will vary* – but students will probably have overtly mentioned both the secret information they have and what they want in order to keep quiet about it. They will probably have used the active voice rather than the passive.

5 Language

See notes for activity 5.

The Actress

1 Research

'Blackmail' is when someone knows a secret about someone else and threatens to tell others unless that person gives them what they want (usually money).

2 Writing

Answers will vary.

3 Comprehension

- 1 Because she killed someone who hurt her and thought that she would be charged with murder.
- 2 Money to not tell anyone about her past.
- 3 by letter
- 4 He will keep asking for more.
- 5 Both her career and Sir Richard's will be damaged.
- 6 Because Margaret has similar hair to Olga and so Levitt will think it is Olga when he sees a 'dead body' in Olga's home. Then Olga can pretend to be the maid and 'find' him with the body. He will think he's about to be charged with murder and will try to run away.
- 7 To drug Margaret so that it looks like she's dead.
- 8 He thinks the maid thinks he has killed Margaret Ryan. If he's arrested he'll be hung. *Refer students to Cultural note 2 on page 80 at the back of the book.*
- 9 Because she played the part of the maid perfectly – Levitt believed her.

4 Writing

- 1 No – he just says he knows who Nancy is.
- 2 Write an article for a newspaper.
- 3 No, because he doesn't ask for money or explicitly say he is the one who will write the article. (he uses the passive to avoid saying that it is him who will write the article)