# Introduction

*Clue by Clue* is a collection of short mysteries to be solved by intermediate level English languge learners as they proceed through a series of clues. It can be used from upper elementary school to adult ESL learners. Each mystery is formatted as a two-page activity. One page is for the teacher, the other a photocopyable page of clues. In addition to being a supplementary activity for speaking and listening practice, the challenge of solving the mystery also requires critical thinking skills.

# User's Guide

## What is *Clue by Clue*?

*Clue by Clue* is a conversation activity. Students are given a brief description of a crime or puzzle — a mystery to solve. The mystery may be to find out who did it. It may be to find out which suspect is lying, or what clue the police find suspicious. It may be to figure out how the criminal did it and got away with it. Students are then given clues to the crime, one at a time. They read the clue and discuss its significance, while trying to solve the mystery. Once all the clues are handed out, they are able to solve the mystery.

# Why Use *Clue by Clue*?

The *Clue by Clue* mysteries make great warm-up activities, conversation class activities, fillers, or even time-killers for those last few minutes of class. They can even be used to introduce units on crime or the justice system such as Pro Lingua's *Verdicts*. The activities lend themselves to practicing specific grammar points in a communicative setting. The clues are also designed to encourage discussion. While students are solving the mysteries they are also developing their spoken language skills, such as:

— Speculation (with modal verbs): *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: *No way! I really think ...*

— Hypotheticals: *What if ..., If he was (were) ... ,*

— Expectations: *So the solution should be …*

Finally, *Clue by Clue* teaches critical reading and thinking skills. To solve the mystery, students must read closely for details, synthesize information from different sources, apply prior knowledge about the world, identify unreliable narrators, and evaluate the logic of different arguments.

# How to Use *Clue by Clue*

The estimated time needed to solve the mysteries is from 20 to 40 minutes, with most of the mysteries needing about 30 minutes. The thirty-one mysteries are arranged from easiest and fastest to solve ("The Empty Bank," about 20 minutes) to more difficult and longest ("The Third Man," 40 minutes). However, solving the mystery can take more or less time than the estimate, depending on the nature of the student group trying to solve the mystery.

1. To prepare, make one copy of the Clues Page for each pair or small group of students. Cut out the clue boxes for each group and make a small stack, being careful to preserve the order.

2. To play, put the students in groups or pairs. Hand out the situation and read it to them as they read/listen along.

3. Give them 3-5 minutes to discuss what might have happened. In more advanced groups, students could begin talking about what information they would need to solve the mystery. They might even begin to predict what evidence there will be.

4. 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 on the board.

5. Give each group time to speculate on the meaning of the clue and what they think happened, typically 3-6 minutes depending on the clue. Monitor the groups to help with comprehension and also to gauge when the students have exhausted the new information. When necessary, you can remind the students how the new clue relates to older clues.

6. Hand out the second clue; again give them time to speculate on the clue and how their opinions may have changed.

7. If the students are having trouble, you can read them the hints on the Teacher Page.

8. Once they have gone through all the clues, have the students discuss all the evidence as a whole and come to a conclusion that solves the mystery.

9. Ask each group to give their solution to the mystery. Be sure to encourage the 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.

10. When the students have finished stating their solution, read the solution on the teacher page. Ask the students how plausible they find the solution. They can also discuss any unanswered questions about the crime that aren't revealed in the story, such as speculating about a motive.

11. Some of the mysteries have follow-up questions. As time permits, read the questions and talk about them in groups or as a whole class.

12. A variation:

    a. To turn it into a competitive activity, place each group's stack at the front of the classroom. Once the students have read and understood the situation, tell them to come get the first clue.

    b. Tell the students that they can take the next clue after 3 minutes. This encourages students to think fast.

    c. After three minutes, each group should send someone to get the next clue. Use a bell to signal the time.

    d. Repeat this until every group has every clue.

    e. Then give the students as much time as they need to solve the mystery. This rewards students who don't think as fast, but process information well. The first group to solve the mystery correctly, with a clear explanation of their logic, wins.

13. Other variations:

    a. After a suspect has been identified, you could organize a sort of mock trial with suspect, defense team, prosecutors, judge, and witnesses.

    b.  Small groups could be a team of investigators conducting  police investigation based on the evidence. They can interview the suspects.

A suggestion:

After cutting out the clues it is a good idea to paste them on index cards, and to  give the cards a longer life, laminate them.