



The Strange Case of Billinghamurst Castle

Author **David Fernández Sifres** / Illustrations **Albertoyos** / 158 pages / Book Series **Avante, School of Detectives**

Objectives

- To encourage students to **enjoy reading imaginative, exciting stories.**
- To provide students with **new lexical items within the context** of the story.
- To give students the opportunity to **both read and listen to a story.**
- To encourage students to **use their observation skills** to follow the detectives at work.

Word bank

Key vocabulary

Words related to castles, machines and robbers: moat, secret door, automaton, handle, sneak, catch someone red-handed, frisk

Words related to precious stones: ruby, emerald, sapphire, diamond, alexandrite, grandidierite, red diamond

Key structures

Formal language (when Oto speaks to the hotel owner)
- If you would be so kind...; One could debate that...; No, I apologise, Mrs. Burrington.

Interjections - Oh! How embarrassing!; Quiet! Against the wall!; You're on fire!; Bravo!; Go Nautilus, go!

Tips and ideas

Before reading

- Show the students the front cover of the story and elicit ideas about where it is set, who the characters are and what the "Strange Case" might be.
- Do they recognise the kids from Nautilus? Even if these characters are unfamiliar, what can they deduce from their appearance?
- Brainstorm stories - true, from books, films or popular legend - about castles. Have they ever visited a castle? What did they see? Can they share any of the history about the place?

During reading

- Listen to a chapter being read aloud on the CD, while the students follow the text. Ask them to reflect on whether this way of reading is helpful - is it too fast or does the fact they are listening and reading at the same time help them to understand more?
- Use the illustrations to elicit what they think is happening - or get them to flick through the illustrations for the whole story and see if they can predict how they relate to the storyline.

- Use quick, short questions after each chapter to check students are following the story. Give students time to consider their reply and share it with their partner, before volunteering the answer.

After reading

- Divide up the class and give groups two or three chapters each. They should write four or five quiz questions (which they know the answers to) for the rest of the class. You could collate the whole quiz and print it.
- Ask your class to scan the story for clues to the case of the disappearing stones, and to make notes on a chart or spidergram of all the suspicious characters, the red herrings and the true clues. As a whole group, take a vote on how effective Nautilus was at uncovering the truth. Would Mr. Gale or the police have done better?
- Remind your students of the suppositions they made about the children from the images on the cover of the book. What more do they know about them now? Get groups to write up a character profile for each member of Nautilus.
- Show your students an example of a book review (e.g. on www.goodreads.com) and ask them to write a short review, including a rating out of five stars.

Teacher support activities

Great Games: Alibi

The police are going to interview the suspects in the strange case of Billingham Castle, so the members of Nautilus need to make sure their alibis are watertight! If the police hear two different stories, they will find those people guilty!

Choose two confident students who are happy to be interrogated, and explain that they must invent a story - for example, where they were when the red diamond was stolen. The rest of the class is divided into two police stations, and must draw up a list of questions for the suspects. Give all groups (the 2 suspects and the 2 groups of police) time to prepare.

If possible, place one group of police at one end of the classroom and the second group at the other end. The police interview one suspect and then the other, using the same list of questions. Finally, both groups of police confer and then decide if their alibis are believable or not.

If you have a very large class, you could have 3 or 4 suspects and 3 or 4 groups of police.

CLIL Link: PRECIOUS STONES – Geography, History, Science & Culture

Find some images of precious stones and elicit what your students know about where they are found, how they were formed or what they are used for.

As a class, draw up a checklist of questions which might include scientific specifications, human, geographical or ethical questions, famous people who own or wear these jewels, or the history of gems and precious metals.

Give groups one precious stone (e.g. You are going to investigate about diamonds), the checklist and an empty visual organiser (e.g. a table, pie chart, spidergram or storyboard), and a deadline. Ideally, students divide up the research work, spend some time in class and at home gathering information, and then come together in the following class and prepare their findings.

Collate all the findings into one blog, leaflet, exhibition and invite another class to come and learn all about precious stones.

English Theatre: The Selfish Giant's visitors

Show the final illustration from the book, where the children are preparing to give their group call, and ask for six volunteers to come to the front of the class and demonstrate.

Ask your class how other people greet each other, show they are members of the same group or show support for each other. Ideas could include American footballers' huddle cry, cheerleaders' dance, rappers giving daps, Masons' secret handshakes, fist-bumping, high fives...

When you have a long list on the board, ask your students to make small groups of between 2 and 5 people, and to imagine a scene where one of these actions takes place.

Who are they? Where are they? What do they do and say? Remind them to think about the intonation and pitch of their speech, and the synchronicity of their actions.

Groups perform for the class and the class must guess the situation. Students could rate each other's performances, using criteria such as ease of understanding, appropriate body language, energy and authenticity.