

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Secret Adversary

by

Agatha Christie

Book Information

Agatha Christie, The Secret Adversary
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Book Level: 5.9
Interest Level: UG

Tommy Beresford and Tuppence begin their amateur sleuthing and find themselves entangled in international espionage.

Topics: Adventure, Crime; Mysteries, Who-dun-it

Main Characters

Jane Finn a missing woman who had been given important government papers and feigns amnesia to survive

Julius Hersheimer Jane Finn's cousin and a millionaire, who is looking for her and who helps Tuppence and Tommy find her

Mr. Brown a mysterious and brilliant man who is the ringleader of a group searching for the documents and whose goal is to be a dictator outside of the law

Mr. Carter the man who employs Tuppence and Tommy to track down Jane Finn and the important documents

Mr. Danvers an American ambassador aboard the "Lusitania" who gave some important papers to Jane Finn for safekeeping

Mr. Whittington a suspicious man encountered by Tuppence who is part of Mr. Brown's gang

Mrs. Marguerite (Rita) Vandemeyer the woman who followed Mr. Danvers on the "Lusitania" and then trails Jane Finn and who also works with Mr. Brown

Sir James Peel Edgerton a respected English lawyer who is trusted by Tuppence and Tommy and who turns out to be Mr. Brown

Tommy Beresford a young man with whom Tuppence teams to earn money in adventurous ways, and whose common sense saves the day

Tuppence or Prudence Cowley a young woman who teams up with an old friend to earn money by trying to locate a missing woman and some important government papers

Vocabulary

archdeacon a church official, usually in the Anglican Church, with powers delegated from the bishop

misogynist someone who hates women

nefarious evil or extremely wicked

plebeian referring to the lower class

Synopsis

When old friends Tommy and Tuppence meet, they discover they have several things in common. They are both nearly broke and without any job prospects. They decide to embark on a joint venture, advertising for any work, even the unreasonable. This involves them in a mystery that includes the missing Jane Finn and some important government documents.

Through an advertisement requesting information regarding Jane Finn, the two meet Mr. Carter, a man employed by the government. He informs them that the documents Jane carried off the "Lusitania" could cause a political disaster if they got into the wrong hands. He hires Tuppence and Tommy to help find Jane and any information about the documents. The ad also brings forward Julius Hersheimer. Julius is Jane's cousin and an American millionaire. He has come to England to locate her.

The search for Jane and the documents leads Tuppence and Tommy into all sorts of adventures. First, Tommy disappears for several days when he follows two men who were involved with Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown is the ringleader of a group that is looking for the missing documents. The group holds Tommy prisoner until a woman, Annette, helps him escape. Later, Tommy discovers Annette is really Jane Finn.

In the meantime, Mrs. Vandemeyer, or Rita, has employed Tuppence as a parlourmaid. Rita is the

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woman who followed Mr. Danvers on the "Lusitania" and saw him give the documents to Jane. Rita was just about to tell Tuppence who Mr. Brown was when she fainted and later died.

Through Rita, Tuppence meets Sir James Peel Edgerton. He is a famous lawyer who is respected throughout England. Tuppence and Tommy both trust Sir James, and they work together several times on the case.

Eventually, however, they come to discover that Sir James is not who he seems to be. After many adventures, the two track down the real Jane Finn. She has been pretending that she lost her memory ever since the group led by Mr. Brown held her prisoner. When she tells Tuppence and Sir James where she hid the documents, the three of them go to the house and remove them from the back of a picture. It is then that readers discover that Sir James is really Mr. Brown.

Fortunately, Tommy had already figured this out. He and Julius have alerted the authorities, and Tuppence and Jane are never in any real danger. In the end, Sir James commits suicide, and the papers are burned. Julius and Jane proclaim their intention to marry, as do Tommy and Tuppence.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

In the end, Sir James Peel Edgerton reveals himself as the infamous Mr. Brown. Why is it necessary for Mr. Carter to read Sir James's diary to be convinced of his other identity?

Sir James is a well-respected lawyer and British political figure of some stature. Most British citizens would probably find it difficult to believe that such a man could be involved in such a dark business. In that sense, his everyday identity is the perfect "disguise" for Mr. Brown.

Literary Analysis

This Agatha Christie mystery takes place in England. Find and list five aspects that give this story its British flavor.

Possible answers include the following: The characters often stop for tea. Tuppence suggests that Tommy find a job "in the colonies." The cost of the newspaper is five shillings. The cab stops outside the tube station. Tommy and Tuppence talk of going to Piccadilly Circus. Mr. Carter talks of how bad a Labour Government would be. Julius tends to business with Scotland Yard.

Inferential Comprehension

Tuppence and Tommy form a team of young adventurers as a money-making scheme. Like many famous duos, they each possess unique qualities that make them successful as a team. Contrast the characters of Tommy and Tuppence. Then tell which character you most closely resemble and why.

Tuppence has more intuition and tends to act more spontaneously. Tommy uses more common sense and is not easily deceived.

Constructing Meaning

By the time Tuppence and Tommy solve this mystery, they also seem to have answered some questions about their own relationship. Based on this, predict what Tuppence and Tommy will be doing in five years.

They will most likely be married to each other, and based on the success of the Young Adventurers, they will be solving more mysteries. Perhaps Mr. Carter will be associated with them, too.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot There are clues throughout the story that point to Sir James as being Mr. Brown. Have the students find as many clues as possible and discuss how the clues can point to either Sir James, Julius, or perhaps someone else.

Recognizing Setting The story is set in London

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after World War I, but the prologue talks about the sinking of the "Lusitania" in 1915. It would be interesting to find out more about this ship and why it was torpedoed. Who was aboard? Was there precious cargo? Was there really an American ambassador aboard? Have the students research everything they can about the ship and its history and write a report.

Understanding Characterization Tommy and Tuppence are the two principal characters in the story. Throughout the book, they learn a lot about themselves and each other. What are some of these things? What is the main thing they discover? Have the students discuss their thoughts. They could also discuss any situations that have made them learn more about themselves.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors This story is rich in English slang and traditions. Have the students identify as many of these as they can and define or explain them. For example, when is tea served and how often each day? What does stony mean? They should write these out and compare them with one another. Perhaps someone in the class has traveled to Great Britain. Have students share any experiences they can.