

# Activities

Set the stage for a night of mystery by doing some sleuthing activities with your Book & Film Club members either before or after viewing the *Lynley* films. These can be simple efforts that will take only a few minutes, or more elaborate productions to which you can devote hours. Here are some suggestions.

## “Who Am I?”

This mystery game invites each of the Book & Film Club members to play detective in order to figure out the mystery of his or her own “identity”! The activity takes very little preparation and can serve as a good icebreaker at the beginning of your Book & Film Club.

Before your club meets, make sticky-note or masking-tape labels for your participants, each with the name of a different Inspector Lynley character from the mystery you just read or watched (e.g., Inspector Lynley, Sergeant Havers, Winston Nkata, Malcolm Webberly, David Hiller, Simon St. James, Deborah St. James, Helen Clyde, etc.). Or, if you have been exploring the mystery genre in general, you could include famous detectives, private eyes, and investigators (e.g., Sherlock Holmes, Watson, Miss Marple, Kojak, Adam Dalgliesh, Sam Spade, Hercule Poirot, Philip Marlowe, Kay Scarpetta, Quincy, Adrian Monk, Spenser, Lord Peter Wimsey, Ellery Queen, Perry Mason, Jessica Fletcher, Father Brown, C. Auguste Dupin, Lucas Davenport, Kinsey Millhone, The Continental Op, Inspector Morse, Jane Tennison, and even Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, Encyclopedia Brown, or Inspector Clouseau).

When club participants arrive, seat them in a circle and stick a label on each participant’s forehead, ensuring that no one sees his or her own identity. Then explain that the objective of the mystery game is to figure out the hidden identity by taking the following steps:

1. Similar to the game “20 Questions,” each participant will take a turn asking the group “yes” or “no” questions to try to figure out his or her own identity. For example, a player may ask, “Am I female?” or “Am I upper class?”
2. If the player receives a “yes” in response to his or her first question, he or she is permitted to ask another question. However, if the player receives a “no” response to a question, it is the next player’s turn to ask a question.

3. The first person to figure out his or her own identity is the winner. You may continue playing until each person has guessed his or her identity.

## Cross the Pond

In Elizabeth George's first Inspector Lynley mystery, *A Great Deliverance*, the narrator explains why Sergeant Havers so strongly objects to being assigned to a partnership with Lynley: "He was a miraculous combination of every single thing that she thoroughly despised: educated at Eton, a first in history at Oxford, a public school voice, and a bloody family tree that had its roots somewhere just this side of the Battle of Hastings. Upper Class." Or, as Havers more directly states: "I will not work with that sodding little fop!"

George is an American writer, yet she skillfully crafts a character in Lynley who embodies those traits commonly associated with British aristocracy. Although Americans pride themselves on having an egalitarian society, are there similar symbols associated with the American version of "aristocracy"? Have club members come up with an American equivalent for each of the following symbols of Lynley's elite status. (For example, is a posh flat in Eaton Terrace equivalent to a Park Avenue condo in Manhattan?)

- *Home*: a posh flat in Eaton Terrace, London
- *Car*: a Bentley
- *Title*: Eighth Earl of Asherton
- *High school education*: Eton
- *College education*: Oxford
- *Accent*: "a public school voice"

Once your group has considered each British symbol, discuss which of these items was the most difficult to translate into American terms. Does, in fact, an American version of "aristocracy" exist? If so, how is it different? (For example, Americans can be wealthy and influential, but can they ever achieve a title that would give them the rank of "earl"?) After discussing Lynley's unique status as an aristocratic British detective, consider how Lynley's world departs from the world of his American counterparts in classic detective fiction (see [A Brief History of the Detective Story](#)). How would Lynley fare in the shoes of iconic American detective characters such as Chandler's Philip Marlowe or Hammett's Sam Spade? Would elite status aid or impede an American investigator operating in this more hardboiled genre of detective fiction?

## Behind the Scenes at Scotland Yard

Inspector Lynley and Detective Sergeant Havers are undoubtedly top-notch detectives, but where would they be without the aid of the state-of-the-art forensics and technology that Scotland Yard has to offer? As a group, try to come up with a list of the high-tech investigative techniques you may have seen on episodes of the *Inspector Lynley Mysteries* (e.g., infrared surveillance in *Know Thine Enemy* or DNA analysis in *Limbo*).\*

Now take a look at some of the most famous mysteries that Scotland Yard has investigated by visiting the “Famous Cases” section of the official Scotland Yard Web site ([www.met.police.uk/history/ripper.htm](http://www.met.police.uk/history/ripper.htm)). Could state-of-the-art forensic technology have helped nab Jack the Ripper? If so, how? In general, how have forensic science and technology influenced the role of the modern detective? How have these changes been reflected in the work of contemporary mystery writers?

\***Note:** To research more techniques, visit the “History by the Yard” Web site ([www.historybytheyard.co.uk/stories\\_from\\_the\\_yard.htm](http://www.historybytheyard.co.uk/stories_from_the_yard.htm)) and click on “Investigation Techniques” in the “Stories from Scotland Yard” section of the site.

## It Was a Dark and Stormy Night...

Together with your Book & Film Club members, try collaboratively creating the opening page or chapter of a murder mystery. You can do this before you meet in person, or spontaneously once you’re together, either by writing, speaking, or acting it out. Here are some variations.

- Write the story together in person by passing a sheet of paper around in a circle and having each participant add a line in turn. You can also play a version called “The Exquisite Corpse,” in which players pass one sheet of paper around the circle, folding it each time so that the next player sees ONLY the line that precedes his or her turn. (For example, if the first player begins with the line “It was a dark and stormy night,” the next player sees this line and adds his or her own, then folds the paper down from the top so that “It was a dark and stormy night” is concealed. The next player sees only the second line before adding his or her third line.)
- “Pass the story” orally: One participant starts off, then each person in turn adds their own next line aloud.
- Create a collaborative story as a warm-up” before you gather as a group. You can “pass the paper” electronically via an e-mail thread or start your story in a wiki or Google document where members can add a line when they like. The finished story can then be read aloud to the assembled group—perhaps by candlelight!

- Develop a mystery story using improvisation. Have two participants take the “stage” and improvise a mystery story situation supplied by the other group members. (For example, “You are a pair of lovers, one of whom has just discovered that the other has been unfaithful. The betrayed is murderously angry.”) The actors continue to develop the story as they go along. At any time, any of the non-actors can shout “freeze,” tap one of the actors on the shoulder, and take his or her place in the scene. The scene continues until the actors, or a previously designated “director,” shouts “cut!” and ends it.
- Create a more complex story by adding a narrator to the improvisation. The narrator, sitting to the side of the action, will partially structure the story, beginning by “introducing” each character, setting up scenes that the actors must carry out. As with the previous game, you may want the non-actors to be able to shout “freeze” and change places with any of the actors at any time. Only the narrator, however, can end the scene.

Since there are so many ways to concoct your mystery together, you might establish certain ground rules beforehand, such as:

- a. A murder must take place or be discovered.
- b. The story must end with a cliffhanger.
- c. An opening line might be set up beforehand. This could be anything from “It was a dark and stormy night” to a line that opens one of the Lynley novels.
- d. Each group member must take a certain number of turns.
- e. To make the game even more challenging, rules might state that for every line added, the title of a Lynley novel or film must be used in a way that fits in naturally with the flow of the story. (To see a list of titles, go to [Resources](#).)

## Play a Murder Game

- To prime the deductive powers of club members, give them “one-minute mysteries” for which they can propose solutions. After you read each story aloud, participants may ask as many “yes-no” questions as they like until someone comes up with the right answer. Below are some classic examples:

*A dead man is found hanging from the ceiling in a completely empty room. All the doors are locked from the inside, and there is a pool of water on the floor. What happened?* (Answer: The man committed suicide in this room by hanging himself; he stood on a block of ice, which melted.)

*A woman comes home to find broken glass and water all over her living room floor. Nora is suffocating on the floor, while Nick is sitting in the corner looking unperturbed. What happened? (Answer: Nora is a goldfish and Nick is a cat. Nick knocked the goldfish bowl over.)*

*Two men go into a bar and order exactly the same drink. The first man drinks his drink quickly, then gets up and leaves. The second man drinks his drink slowly, over the course of several hours. The first man lives, and the second man dies. Why? (Answer: The ice in both drinks was poisoned, but the first man drank his before much poison had a chance to melt into the drink. The second man drank his so slowly the ice had time to melt and he ingested the full dose of poison.)*

- Play the classic but simple “Murder” game. Participants sit in a circle while one player, the Detective, leaves the room. The remaining players choose pieces of paper from a bowl. One piece has been marked with an X. The player who receives the X is the Murderer for this round of the game. Play begins when the Detective returns to the circle; the Murderer then attempts to “kill” as many victims as possible by winking at individual players without being seen by the Detective or by the other players. (When a player is winked at, he or she should die in as dramatic a fashion as possible.) The Detective, meanwhile, must guess the Murderer before everyone is killed, but, depending on the number of players, will have only a limited number of guesses in which to do so (three or fewer, generally). If the Detective fails to guess the Murderer, he or she must be Detective again; if the Detective guesses correctly, he or she chooses someone else as Detective and joins the circle.
- For more elaborate options, visit [MysteryNet.com](http://MysteryNet.com) (see [Resources](#)). There you can find links to sites that sell “murder in a kit”-style games that allow a host or hostess to plan an evening-long murder investigation with participants playing various roles.