

Study Guide for Murder on the Canadian

Tom Austen, amateur detective, and his school rival, Dietmar Oban, are travelling from Winnipeg to Vancouver on The Canadian. During the journey a woman is murdered, and Tom employs his amateur detective techniques to determine who killed her. Tom finds himself in great danger and fighting for his life in a black railway tunnel in the Rockies.

Pre-reading suggestions

The setting of this story is on board the supercontinental train, The Canadian. Although it may not be possible to acquire pictures of The Canadian, VIA Rail does supply a variety of pamphlets, maps and menus which can help to establish the setting for students who have never enjoyed the experience of train travel. Using train pictures, introduce train terms, such as dome car, sleeping car, baggage car, dining car, berths, conductor, porter, platform, vestibule and station. Encourage students to read the excellent account of a young girl's cross-Canada journey by train in Beverley Allinson and Barbara O'Kelly's *All Aboard! A Cross-Canada Adventure* (Owl Book, published by Greey de Pencier, Toronto, 1979).

Create a large map of western Canada, showing the route of The Canadian from Winnipeg to Vancouver.

QUESTIONS

Literal

1. Why was Tom travelling to Vancouver?
2. Did Tom know ahead of time that Dietmar Oban would be a travelling companion?
3. Why did Tom and Dietmar suspect that the grey-haired man in the dark suit might be a criminal?
4. What did Dermot, the young porter, tell Tom about the old porter who was working in Tom's car?
5. Why did Tom use a handkerchief when he picked up the knife which Richard Saks dropped?
6. Several clues lead you to think that Richard Saks killed his wife. List three of these clues.
7. Who was the person in Car 165 who was muttering in his sleep about knives and dead bodies?
8. Why did Tom order the Spanish omelette? Then, why did he not eat it?
9. How did two cigarette butts reveal to Tom the true identity of the killer?
10. How did Tom manage to hit the killer with a rock in the dark tunnel?

Inferential

11. At the end of chapter six, Tom said, "I think I've got it!" At that point, who did you suspect was the murderer, and why?

12. What kind of person do you think Dietmar is?
13. When Tom said, "If the washroom is bugged, the running water will cover our words" what was he talking about?
14. Give your opinion of Tom as a detective.

Critical

15. What would you do if you suspected that a bomb was set to go off near you, particularly if you were in a crowded public area?
16. At what age do you think children should be allowed to travel on their own? Explain your answer.

Research

17. Prepare a report on what it is like to travel by train. Besides the information you can obtain from books, try to interview someone who has taken a train journey.
18. Select a Canadian community which is served by a railway and find out how it helps the community to be on the route of trains carrying freight and passengers.

ANSWERS

1. Tom was going to spend the summer with his grandparents. (p. 10)
2. Tom did not know Dietmar would be his travelling companion. (p. 10)
3. Tom and Dietmar suspected the grey-haired man because he had an attaché case handcuffed to his wrist. (p. 12)
4. The old porter had been a professional boxer who'd been injured in a fight and so had fits of violent temper; apparently, he'd thrown a conductor out of a speeding train. (p. 34)
5. Tom didn't want to get his own fingerprints on the knife. (pp. 42,44)
6. Clues that suggested Richard Saks killed his wife include (1) he was seen holding the knife, (2) he argued with his wife in the bar and said he hated the sight of her, (3) he had an angry fight with his wife in their compartment, (4) he was upset when his wife said she wanted to be free again in order to return to Hollywood, (5) when Tom wished Richard Saks a good night, the man replied "it won't be for me". (pp. 44-47)
7. Tom Austen. (p. 56)
8. The Spanish Omelette was the cheapest item on the menu; later Tom thought it was poisoned so he avoided eating it. (pp. 65,66)
9. The first butt, found in the murdered woman's compartment, had a red lipstick stain, and so did the butt of the cigarette which the killer was smoking as she talked to Tom. (p. 79)
10. Tom threw the rock in the direction of the flash of the gun. (p. 86)
11. Answers will vary
12. Answers will vary
13. Answers will vary
14. Answers will vary
15. Answers will vary

16. Answers will vary

17. Answers will vary

18. Answers will vary