



Making Inferences

with a Mystery Play

There are so many ways you can use this fun resource with your class! It can be used as a reader's theater activity, a close reading lesson, an assessment, or as independent practice with making inferences. You could even have your students act out the play, and then have them discuss in small groups their answers to the questions at the end.

Who will solve this mysterious case of mistaken identities?

I have used this with 5th graders, but it could definitely be used with 5th-7th grades. My students love taking turns reading the different parts aloud. It's a short and interesting story, and it really teaches students to pay attention to the details or "clues" that lead to the inferences needed to solve the mystery.

***Note:** The final page of this resource is intended to be read *after* students have answered the questions. (Hint: The Policeman is Jimmy. 😊)



After Twenty Years

Adapted from a short story by O. Henry

Introduction

Two friends grow up in the big city. They are like brothers. Then, one of them leaves town and returns twenty years later. Which friend has changed the most- the one who left, or the one who stayed behind?

Characters

- Narrator
- Bob (a well-dressed man)
- Policeman
- Young Bob
- Young Jimmy
- Man



Scene One

Narrator: A New York policeman on the beat walks up the empty street. The time is almost ten o'clock at night, and chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them blow. The policeman slows in front of a dark doorway. A man named Bob stands in the shadows there.

Bob: It's all right officer. I'm just waiting for a friend.

Policeman: Yes?

Bob: It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Let me explain. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands- Big Joe Brady's restaurant.

Policeman: Until five years ago, when it was torn down.

Bob strikes a match and lights his cigar.

The light shows a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. He wears a diamond pin in his scarf.

Bob: Twenty years ago tonight I dined here at Big Joe Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised right here in New York, just like brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty.....

Scene Two

Narrator: Twenty years previously, young Bob and Jimmy talk at Big Joe Brady's restaurant.

Young Bob: Are you sure you don't want to head west with me, Jimmy? I'm telling you, we can make our fortunes out there.

Young Jimmy: I guess I'll stay right here in New York, Bob. To me, this is the only place on earth.

Young Bob: I'll miss you, pal.

Young Jimmy: And I'll miss you.

Young Bob: Say, why don't we make an appointment to meet each other again?

Young Jimmy: What do you mean?

Young Bob: Let's meet up again, years from now, when we'll have our destinies worked out and our fortunes made. What do you say we meet again in twenty years?

Young Jimmy: I get you. A reunion.

Young Bob: Exactly!

Young Jimmy: No matter who we are, or what we're doing, or how far we have to come, twenty years from tonight let's meet right here, at Big Joe Brady's restaurant.

Young Bob: It's a deal. I'll see you then, pal!

Scene Three

Policeman: It sounds pretty interesting. Seems like a long time between meets, though. Haven't you heard from your old friend since you left?

Bob: Well, yes. For a time we wrote letters. But after a year or two we lost track of each other. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's still alive. He was the truest, most loyal chap that ever lived. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up!

Bob takes a diamond-studded watch from his pocket.

Bob: It's three minutes to ten. It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door.

Policeman: Did pretty well in the West, didn't you?

Bob: You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was kind of a plodder, though, good fellow that he was. I had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my fortune.

Policeman: Well, I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around alright. Are you going to give him until ten o'clock, and then head out?

Bob: I should say not! I'll wait for him at least until ten-thirty – maybe longer! So long, officer!

Policeman: Good night, sir!

Scene Four

Narrator: A fine cold drizzle begins to fall. Bob waits, smoking his cigar. After twenty minutes, a tall man in a light jacket, collar turned up to his ears, crosses the street.

Man: Is that you, Bob?

Bob: Is that you, Jimmy Wells?

Man: Bless my heart! It's Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I'd find you here if you were still alive. Well, well, well! The restaurant's gone, Bob. I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?

Bob: It has given me everything I asked for. You've changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall.

Man: Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty.

Bob: Are you doing well here in New York, Jimmy?

Man: Moderately. I work for the city. Come on, Bob, we'll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times.

Narrator: The two men walk up the street. Bob, his ego enlarged by success, tells his companion all about his career. The other man listens with interest. Soon they pass a brightly-lit drugstore. In the glare of the lights, the two men take a good look at each other.

Bob: Hold on! You're not Jimmy Wells! Twenty years is a long time, but it's not long enough to turn a man's eyes from brown to blue!

Man: It can be long enough time to turn a good man into a bad one. You've been under arrest for the past ten minutes, "Sneaky" Bob. The Chicago police department thought you might be heading our way. They sent us a telegram saying they wanted a little chat with you.

Bob: *(sighs)* I'll come quietly. But how did you know where to find me?

Man: Here's a note I was asked to hand you. You can read it before I take you to the station. It's from Patrolman Wells.



Making Inferences

Name: _____

Scene	Question	Your Inference	CLUES from the Text
1	Why was Bob waiting in the doorway of the store?		
1-2	Who left New York? What made Jimmy and Bob decide to meet up again in twenty years?		
1-4	What evidence from the text shows that Bob is now a wealthy man?		
3	Why did the policeman ask Bob how long he was going to wait for his friend?		
4	How did Bob know the Man was not Jimmy?		

*** Read *AFTER* students have answered the above questions ***

Bob reads the note.

Policeman: Dear Bob, I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar, I recognized your face from a “wanted” poster sent from Chicago. I just couldn’t arrest you myself, so I went around and got a detective to do the job. Signed, Your friend after twenty years.