

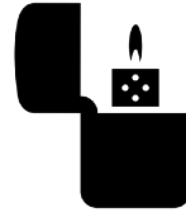
THE BET

A story lesson plan
by Jamie Keddie

Lesson *Stream*



THE BET



About this activity

Exploring a sinister bet that provides the premise for a story

⚠ WARNING: This lesson plan includes scenes with gore, strong language, and references to alcohol, which may not be suitable for some students. Please review and proceed with caution.

- ▶ **Language level:** B1 / B2
- ▶ **Age of learner:** Teenagers and adults
- ▶ **Duration of activity:** 60 minutes
- ▶ **Tasks:** Speaking; story building
- ▶ **Topics:** Story premises
- ▶ **Language focus:** Writing a narrative text

For this activity, you will need the following:

- **Two video clips** from the film *Four Rooms*
- **A Canva slideshow** which includes the video clips
- **The worksheet** on page eight (one for each student)

Note: For all materials and discussion, go to the corresponding page in the Resources section. Just scan or click on the code.



About the story

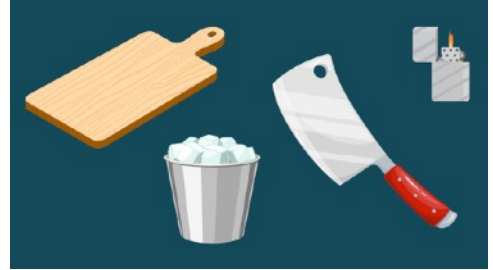
This activity explores a sinister bet that has featured in two different films. It works like this: A challenges B to light a cigarette lighter ten times in a row. If B succeeds, they win A's car. If they fail, A gets to chop off their little finger.

The bet is the premise of *Man from the South*, a 1960 episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, in which a mysterious man named Carlos (Peter Lorre) offers the bet to a young gambler (Steve McQueen). The same bet appears in the 1995 dark comedy film *Four Rooms*, which tells four stories by different filmmakers. In the final story, *The Man from Hollywood*, two men decide to recreate the bet during a drunken party. Clips from both films can be found online.

Activity outline

1. Show students the four images in the accompanying slideshow. Elicit the names of the objects and write them on the board.

- A chopping board
- A bucket of ice
- A chopping knife (also called a cleaver)
- A cigarette lighter (Zippo style)



2. Explain that the four objects are part of a story. Ask if anyone knows the story and, if so, to explain what it's about. If not, invite students to make predictions.

Tip
✦✦

If anyone is familiar with the story, you can let them explain how the sinister bet works without going into any more information than that. Whatever students say, you do not have to confirm whether they are right or wrong at this stage.

As you tell the story (coming next), students may want to continue guessing what's going on. You can give them opportunities to share their ideas, and if they manage to figure out the nature of the bet before you reveal that part of the story, that's perfectly fine. Again, you can entertain their ideas without confirming whether or not they are correct.

3. Tell students that the story is in two parts. Display the comprehension support slide included in the Canva slideshow (see below).


Refer to the scripts on the next two pages and tell students parts one and two of the story. Speak slowly and clearly and pause to ask the questions as shown.

Part one of the story involves:


- A night receptionist in a hotel
- A penthouse (a luxury apartment at the top of the building)
- Four drunk guests: Chester, Norman, Angela and Leo

Part two is a story within the story and involves:

- *The Man from the South*
- Director Alfred Hitchcock
- Actor Peter Lorre
- Actor Steve McQueen
- A bet
- Ten times in a row



Peter Lorre



Steve McQueen

Part one

You are the night receptionist in a hotel.
It's three in the morning.
Everything is quiet.
And then the phones rings.

The call comes from the penthouse on the top floor – the most expensive room in the hotel.
And staying in the penthouse is a man called Chester – the most important guest in the hotel.

Chester sounds a little bit drunk.
And it sounds like he has company.

Chester has a special request for you.
He asks you to take him:

- A chopping board
- A bucket of ice
- A chopping knife

- *Do you agree to do this?*

Of course you do!
You have no choice.
Chester is the most important guest in the hotel.
You have to do exactly what he asks.

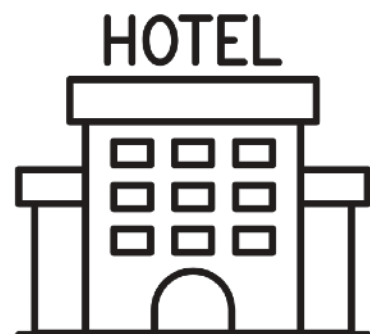
So you go to the kitchen to get a chopping board, a chopping knife and a bucket of ice.
Then you take the lift to the penthouse on the top floor of the hotel.

You knock on the door.
Chester answers.
He thanks you for coming.
He takes the objects from you,
And tells you to come in and join the party.

There are three other guests in the penthouse.
Chester introduces you to Angela, Norman and Leo,
Then he hands you a glass of champagne,
And asks you to sit down.

You want to know what's going on.

- *What do you think they are planning to do?*
- *Why do you think Chester invited you to stay?*
- *How are you feeling right now?*





On IMDb, you will find some good images from *Man from the South*. There is a particularly ominous one of Steve McQueen sitting a table with Peter Lorre standing beside him with a chopping knife in hand. Show the image to students before continuing with part two below.

Part two

So, there you are, sitting in the penthouse at the top of the hotel,
Drinking champagne with Chester and his friends.
You brought the chopping board, the chopping knife and the bucket of ice,
And now you want to know what's going on.

This is what they tell you:

There is a film called *Man from the South*.
It was directed by Alfred Hitchcock.
And it stars Peter Lorre and Steve McQueen.
In the film, Peter Lorre makes a bet with Steve McQueen that Steve McQueen can't light his cigarette lighter ten times in a row.
If he can do this, Steve McQueen wins Peter Lorre's car.
But if he fails to do it, Peter Lorre gets to chop off Steve McQueen's little finger.

- *What do you think of this bet?*

Anyway, tonight in the penthouse,
Chester and Norman have made the same bet.
If Norman can light his cigarette lighter ten times in a row, he gets Chester's car.
But if he fails to do it, Chester gets to chop off Norman's little finger.

- *But why do they need a bucket of ice?*

So that if Norman loses his little finger, they can keep it cold and take him to hospital where they will put it back on.

- *And why do they need you to stay?*

Because Norman is their friend and they wouldn't want to chop off a friend's finger.
So they need someone like you to do the job for them.
The question is:

- *What is your price?*

4. Keep the discussion going as long as possible. Ask questions and play Devil's advocate to challenge students' perspectives. Here are some ideas for questions, arguments and counterarguments:

Chester

- It's a terrible deal for Chester. He would either lose his car or see his friend injured. Why would he want to do it?
- Perhaps Chester has a twisted mind. Or maybe he just enjoys the thrill.

Norman

- Doesn't it all depends on the car? What if it was a brand-new Ferrari?
- Would it be so bad to lose your little finger? It's not very useful after all.
- Does it matter if it's your left hand or your right hand?
- Although our little fingers might seem less essential than the others, they are actually quite important for grip strength and hand stability.
- How easy or difficult would be be for surgeons to put your finger back on?

The night receptionist

- What if something goes wrong. One slip and you could accidentally chop off two fingers instead of one.
- Could you even chop off a finger with a single cut?
- If you accept the offer, don't forget that you might not have to do anything at all. Norman might be lucky and light his lighter ten times in a row. You still get the money.

5. Ask students to guess how the story ends.

6. Find out if students have seen the film *Four Rooms* and then explain the concept.

Four Rooms (1995) is a dark comedy set in a hotel on New Year's Eve. It features four stories by different directors, each taking place in a different room. The main character, Ted the Bellhop (Tim Roth), encounters increasingly bizarre situations. The final story, *The Man from Hollywood*, was written and directed by Quentin Tarantino and includes the drunken bet referenced in this activity.



7. Show students the two clips from *The Man from Hollywood* and find out if they guessed the ending correctly.



Once students realise that *Four Rooms* is a dark comedy, this may influence their predictions about how the story ends. You can pause the film just before Norman attempts to light his cigarette lighter and ask students to guess what happens next. You can also warn them that there may or may not be gore. Whether or not they choose to watch is up to them!

8. The worksheet on page eight includes instructions for a task. Go over these instructions, put students into small groups and give out copies of the worksheet. Ask students to work in their groups to create an idea for another story which uses the same sinister bet as its premise.



Ask each group to nominate a notetaker to write down and document the group's ideas.

9. Once students have finished their stories, ask each group to choose a spokesperson – but not the notetakers as they deserve a break! Then ask the spokespersons to share their group's idea to the rest of the class.



Give the spokespersons a few minutes to organise and practise presenting their stories. As they do so, other group members should offer help and support.

10. Direct students to the episode of *Man from the South* which you can access on YouTube. Alternatively, direct them to the corresponding Wikipedia page which includes a plot summary.

11. Ask students to compare the storyline of *Man from the South* with the ones they wrote. Encourage them to find and comment on something they like or find interesting: an unexpected twist, a character's motive, how the suspense is built, etc.

Creative Replay

The task guides students through the same creative process as the writer of *Man from the South*. In other words, they have to craft a storyline from the same premise, considering many of the same questions and challenges the author faced. I refer to this technique as “creative replay,” and it has two main objectives:

- To enhance students' appreciation of the actual story when they view or read it.
- To help them notice elements of storytelling craft that will strengthen their skills for similar tasks in the future.

What is a premise?

A premise is an idea that gives rise to a story. It tells us about the main characters, the situation and the conflict they face.

Here are three examples:

- ✈️ A plane crashes on a desert island. All the survivors are schoolboys, and there are no adults to supervise them. (Novel: *Lord of the Flies*)
- ❄️ A self-centred weatherman finds himself reliving the same day over and over. (Film: *Groundhog Day*)
- 👤 A man is born old and ages backwards, experiencing life in reverse. (Short story/film: *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*)

In some cases, a writer might start with a premise and then build the story from there. This is likely what happened in *Man from the South*, the original story featuring the cigarette lighter bet.

Your task

Put yourself in the writer's shoes. Imagine a story that could come from this premise.

A challenges B to light a cigarette lighter ten times in a row. If B succeeds, they win A's car. If they fail, A gets to chop off their little finger.

Consider the following questions as you develop your story:

- **Characters:** Who are A and B? What are their backstories and relationship? Are there other characters involved?
- **Motives:** Why would A make this bet? Why might B consider accepting it?
- **Setting:** Where does the story take place?
- **Plot:** What happens in the story and what are the outcomes? Does anyone lose anything? Are there any twists or surprises?

Work together to develop a storyline – a description of the main events in the story, showing what happens from beginning to end. Someone in your group should make notes. Later, you will share your story with the rest of the class.

**Good luck and
no Googling!**

