



The Hangman

Louise Penny

Reading Level: 3

Interest Level: Adult

Book Summary

One cold November morning the sleepy village of Three Pines wakes abruptly to the suicide of Arthur Ellis, a guest of the Inn and Spa. Enter Chief Inspector Gamache and his second in command, Inspector Beauvoir. Their investigation starts with the discovery of the dead man hanging from a tree in the woods and leads to the revelation that the suicide is, in fact, a murder. Now it is up to Gamache to determine who among the residents and guests of Three Pines is a killer. He unveils not one murderer, but three, along with stories of false identities and vengeance.

Author Biography

Louise Penny is the author of the Chief Inspector Gamache mystery books. These murder mystery novels are set in the fictional village of Three Pines, Quebec. Louise has won many awards, including the Agatha Award for best mystery novel.

Louise has also worked as a journalist and radio host. In 1996, she left her career at CBC Radio to become a writer. Louise lives with her husband and her dog in the small village of Sutton, south of Montreal.

Note to the educator: The following activities are suggestions only. Please choose and adjust the projects and questions according to the specific needs and level of your students as well as their experience with doing novel studies. Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

Book Cover and Title

Ask students to look at the book's cover and title.

- (a) Ask students to predict what kind of book this will be (e.g., adventure, mystery, comedy).
- (b) Ask students to predict what the book will be about. Encourage students to expand on their predictions. (Depending on students' predictions, ask questions such as, who do you think was hanged and why? Who do you think did the hanging and why?)
- (c) Ask students to brainstorm the meaning of the word "hangman."

The Crime Scene

Tell the students that the main character in *The Hangman* is Chief Inspector Gamache. He works for the Quebec Provincial Police. Explain that an inspector is a detective. Inspectors, or detectives, use different techniques to investigate the scene of a crime. For example, they look for footprints. Ask students if they watch crime shows such as *CSI* on TV. Ask the students to think of specific ways inspectors investigate a crime scene.

WORKING WITH THE BOOK

Characters

Tell students that readers can learn about the characters in a novel in three ways—from (1) what the writer tells us, (2) what the characters say, do, and think, and (3) what others think and say about the characters.

As students read, have them note a few examples from each chapter, where applicable, of how the writer develops the following characters: Angela, Tom Scott, and Arthur Ellis. Encourage students to make inferences about the characters, where possible. Then put the students in small groups and have them share their examples.

How do we make inferences?

Active readers use their experience and knowledge to make educated guesses about characters and their motives. Readers who make inferences use clues in the text together with their own experiences to help them figure out the author's meaning.

Character: _____

What the writer tells us

Inference

What other characters think and say about the character

Inference

What the character says, does, and thinks

Inference

Plot

As students read the novel, have them complete the following clue chart. After students have finished the book, discuss how each clue affected Gamache's investigation.

Character	What clues does this character give Gamache?
Dr. Harris	
Inspector Beauvoir	
Myrna	
Arthur Ellis	

Setting

Explain to students that the setting is the time and location in which a story takes place. Have students fill in the following chart with words and phrases that describe the various settings. Ask students to visualize each setting. Ask them (a) how the setting makes them feel, and why, (b) what the setting makes them think of, and why, and (c) how the setting adds to the story.

The Woods (Chapter 1)	Three Pines (page 35)	The Bistro (pages 36–37)

TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. “Like most murders, this one was about secrets and lies. But hidden below all those lies was an emotion. Sorrow. A sorrow so great it turned into a monster. And that monster finally consumed the man.” (page 78)
 - (a) The death of James Hill’s wife and daughter was a great sorrow in Hill’s life. What does the writer mean in saying the sorrow “turned into a monster” and “consumed the man”?
 - (b) Revenge means getting back at someone for something bad that they have done to you. Or for something bad they have done to another person. Share stories of revenge. Is revenge ever justified? When?

2. “Hill spent years trying to get someone to take the blame. But the kids’ lawyers wouldn’t even let them say they were sorry. They just stopped talking.” (page 70)
 - (a) Imagine that the driver took the blame for the accident that killed Hill’s wife and daughter. Imagine, also, that Hill received an apology from the driver and the rest of the kids. Do you think Hill’s life would have been different? How? Why?
 - (b) An apology is just words; it cannot change what has been done to somebody. Why, then, is getting an apology important?

3. Reread Hill’s suicide note (page 27).
 - (a) Do you think Hill should be forgiven for what he has done? Why, or why not?
 - (b) What does Hill want you to understand?
 - (c) Do you think Hill is an evil person? Why, or why not?

4. “But Gamache knew what happened when a terrible truth was buried. It didn’t just go to sleep. No. It grew. Big. It became huge. Monstrous. It ate away a person’s insides. And left him hollow. Empty.” (page 72)

Whose “terrible truth” is Gamache thinking about? What do you think Gamache means when he suggests burying a terrible truth leaves a person hollow and empty? Do you agree?

5. “ ‘They’ll be tried for murder,’ said Gamache. ‘Their lawyer will plead self-defence.’ And he might even get them off, Gamache knew. But they would never be free.” (page 87)
- (a) Who is Gamache talking about? What does Gamache mean by, “But they would never be free.” Do you agree with Gamache? Why, or why not?
- (b) Imagine you are a jurist at Angela and Mike’s trial. Would you let them off? Why, or why not?
- (c) If Angela and Mike had revealed the truth at the time of the accident, how would their lives have been different?
6. “He knew that fear was so powerful it made people do things they could not normally do. Like lift a car off a loved one. Or race into a burning building. Fear saved lives.” (pages 30–31)
- Share stories of people who have done superhuman things because of fear. How does fear trigger acts of strength and courage?
7. Some sentences take on a deeper, more important meaning after you know the whole story. Explain how the meaning of the each sentence below changes after knowing the whole story.
- (a) “Then her face became troubled. ‘Do you know what happened to poor Mr. Ellis?’ ” (page 32)
- (b) “How had James Hill coped?” (page 69)

WRITING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Choose a character or event from the novel that you connected with in some way. For example, did the character or event remind you of something in your life? Cause an emotional reaction in you? Teach you something? Describe what, how, and why in a paragraph.
2. There are three versions of Tom Scott's offer to drive Angela home. Reread Angela's version (page 33), Tom Scott's version (page 63), and Gamache's version (pages 85–86). What information do you learn about the incident from each of the versions? Write a factual account of what happened.
3. Imagine you are Tom Scott. Write a journal entry that describes your finding the body and being interviewed by Gamache. Include how you were feeling and what you were thinking at the time.
4. Imagine you are spending a couple of nights in Three Pines. Write a postcard/email to a friend describing the village.

PROJECTS and ACTIVITIES

1. Violence

Activity 1

Write this statement on a flip chart or whiteboard: “TV is full of violence.” Have students provide their opinion on this statement. Then, have students look in a TV guide at the listings for one evening of programming. Have them discuss how many programs contain (or possibly contain) some form of violence. Then, have the students revisit their original opinions. Have their opinions changed?

Activity 2

Have students monitor TV watching in their homes for one day. Have them keep track of (a) the programs that they (and other family members) watch and (b) the type of violence they see (e.g. a car hits a child; a young woman stabs her older lover). Group students and have them compare their results and draw conclusions (e.g., many acts of violence are between young men; few acts of violence involve seniors).

Activity 3

Have students discuss how parents, the community, and the government can reduce the amount of violence that children see on TV.

2. Crime Shows

Have students watch their favourite crime show and compare it to *The Hangman* in terms of (a) setting, (b) main characters, and (c) techniques used to solve crimes.

3. Capital Punishment

- (a) Explain that capital punishment is also known as the death penalty and that it is not legal in Canada. Ask students what they know about the death penalty. Have students debate (a) the pros and cons of capital punishment and (b) under what circumstances, if any, capital punishment should be legal.
- (b) Have students watch the movies *The Thin Blue Line* (1988; director: Errol Morris) and *Dead Man Walking* (1995; director: Tim Robbins). Have students discuss the movies in terms of (a) how the death penalty is applied to minorities and other marginalized groups in society and (b) the complexities of applying the death penalty.

4. Revenge

- (a) Have students discuss the following sayings:

“An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”

“Turn the other cheek.”

Ask students what the phrases mean. Where do these sayings come from?

Is one teaching better than the other? Is one of them easier to follow?

- (b) Ask students to consider which teaching they think most people follow. Have them give a reason for their answer.

Then have the students conduct a survey to check their hypotheses. Have students ask eight to ten people the question “What do you usually do when someone does something bad to you?” and jot down the responses. Put the students in groups. Have them review the responses to their survey and track how many of the responses fall under each of the two teachings. Have the students (a) conclude which teaching people generally follow, (b) compare their hypotheses to the group’s conclusion, and (c) give a reason for any differences between their hypotheses and the conclusion.

5. MADD

- (a) Discuss with students the idea that people deal with death in many different ways. For some, the sudden and painful death of a loved one leads to positive action.
- (b) Use the organization MADD as an example of personal pain leading to positive action. Tell students that MADD means Mothers Against Drunk Driving and have them discuss the following questions:

Who do you think started this organization? Why?

What do you think is the organization’s goal?

What kinds of things do you think the organization does to reach its goals?

Have students make a list of additional questions about the organization they would like to have answered. Discuss how they would find answers to their questions.

FURTHER READING

If students liked this book, they might also enjoy:

Shipwreck, Maureen Jennings, Good Reads (GRP)

The Stalker, Gail Anderson-Dargatz, Good Reads (GRP)

Chickenfeed, Minette Walters, Quick Reads (GRP)

An Accident Waiting to Happen, Vincent Banville, Open Door Series (GRP)

Dead Man's Island, John Escott, Oxford Bookworms (GRP)

Love You to Death, Gail Bowen, Rapid Reads (Orca)

The Spider Bites, Medora Sale, Rapid Reads (Orca)

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