

Junior Secondary
Oxford English Writing Competition

Whodunnit?

Read **Mr Jasper Tsang's** beginning of the detective story below.

It was the last lesson of the day, an English lesson. The teacher, Mrs Wu, had been talking non-stop in front of the class for the last twenty minutes, oblivious to the noise of the many private conversations going on in the classroom.

Tommy looked around at his classmates. Then he looked at his wristwatch. The school bell would ring in fifteen minutes. 'Fifteen more minutes,' he thought, 'and I'll be safe.'

The minutes passed like hours. A big man suddenly appeared at the classroom door, silhouetted against the afternoon sunlight. Tommy could not see the face clearly, but he knew it was Mr Lee, the Deputy School Principal. Tommy's heart missed a beat.

Mrs Wu went over to the door, and Mr Lee said something to her in a subdued voice. Tommy could not hear what was said, but he saw the serious look on Mrs Wu's face.

Mrs Wu stepped aside and Mr Lee walked into the classroom. 'Boys and girls,' he said aloud, 'one of your bags contains something that should not be there. We have to take a quick look in each of your bags.'

'What are you looking for, sir? Has someone reported a theft?' asked a little boy in the front row.

'Can't tell you yet, sonny,' replied Mr Lee. 'Now, boys and girls, put your bags on your desks and open them.'

The stern tone in Mr Lee's voice seemed to have frozen everyone. Tommy looked around again, but no one moved a muscle.

"Do not make me say again," said Mr Lee. Even Mrs Wu looked a little bit frightened. Then all the students acted, and waited for another instruction. Tommy had no choice but to follow. "Please assist me, Mrs Wu," said Mr Lee as he was checking the first row carefully. Mrs Wu started to check the last row.

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Tommy was on his way to school. The gentle breeze swiped his face, and the sun shone on him brightly. However, to him, it was just another boring day. Reaching the front gate, Tommy walked quickly to his classroom. There were not many students. He put his phone in his pocket and headed for the washroom.

He walked into the last cubicle and took out his phone. "Wait just a second," he thought, "did I see something?" He turned to the back and saw four lines of tidy words written on the wall in purple, the colour of mystery.

*A sound of a bird, a man and a festival
Hidden in where, glister and rattle
Opens the room of items, it's a one-shot opportunity
Choose the right key, or the door shuts permanently*

Below the words stood a purple, perfectly square box. Out of curiosity, Tommy opened it slowly and carefully. Inside, there was a chain of silver keys, each with a word carved on it. He quickly looked through the words. "Answers to the riddle," he thought. As the bell rang, he decided to solve it later. He slipped the box in his pocket and went back to the classroom.

"A sound," he thought. He took out all the keys with words related to sound and put them on the table. "Room of items. Oh, must be the storage room. I've got one chance to open the door then." He looked back at the keys. "The connection of where, glister and rattle? Think, Tommy!"

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"Tommy? Tommy!" Mr Lee broke his thoughts.

"Yes, sorry," replied Tommy nervously.

"Hands away, I need to examine it." Tommy obeyed. A guy whistled a note and gave him a thumbs down. He looked out and saw half of the class was standing outside, holding their gaming devices and other illegal things at school. Mr Lee searched his whole bag but, of course, found nothing.

Suddenly, a thought came to Tommy. He looked at the guy who whistled.

"The beginning of 'where' is 'wh', the middle of 'glister' is 'is' and the end of 'rattle' is 'tle'. The sound of those three makes 'whistle'!"

"Could you stand up? Your left pocket seems too full."

"I've only got a little box inside."

Mr Lee held up his fat palm, and Tommy put the box there.

"What is the answer?" murmured Mr Lee, looking at the box.

"Whistle," said Tommy confidently.

He felt a sudden pressure on his shoulder. Before he could say anything, he and Mr Lee were in a void, with nothing else. He looked at his teacher, mouth open. "What?" he said hoarsely.

“We teachers know the answer. But we’d like to find the smartest students and eliminate them. We don’t want anyone with a high IQ to study here, so we can control the ones left. You’re lucky to be the first one for us to find.”

“Absurd!” Tommy’s fear turned into hatred, and that turned into anger. “Take me back!”

“Don’t worry,” the evil Mr Lee smiled. “Your relatives and friends will be brainwashed so that you’ll be forgotten. Enjoy your time here.”

Tommy was left alone.