

The Slightly Jones Mysteries by Joan Lennon:

The Case of the London Dragonfish

The Case of the Glasgow Ghoul

The Case of the Cambridge Mummy

The Case of the Hidden City

(published by Catnip Press)

The Slightly Jones series is set in the Victorian Age, in the 1890s. The heroine is a spindly, feisty, red-haired girl with a burning ambition – to become as good a detective as the great Sherlock Holmes himself! She lives in London, in the mysteriously-named Limpopo House, with Granny Tonic and a collection of eccentric lodgers.

In her first adventure (**The Case of the London Dragonfish**) Mr Thurgood, one of the tenants of Limpopo House, is falsely accused of stealing a priceless fossil from the Natural History Museum. It's up to Slightly to find the real culprit AND restore the Dragonfish fossil to the Museum in time for a private viewing by A Very Important Person.

In her second adventure (**The Case of the Glasgow Ghoul**) Slightly travels the length of the country with Granny Tonic and the Gentler brothers to solve a puzzling enigma – who is stealing all those apparently random artefacts from the Hunterian Museum? And how are they *managing* it? Is the thief really a one-legged man with a trained ape? Or is the answer something even stranger?

Then it's on to Cambridge (**The Case of the Cambridge Mummy**) where senseless acts of vandalism have been occurring in the Fitzwilliam Museum since the acquisition of an ancient Egyptian necklace - with a curse attached. Could a mummy really be stalking the corridors and why is Agnes Amberleigh acting so strangely? The mysteries deepen until, on Christmas Eve, Slightly follows her nose into the midst of a den of dangerous thieves. But will she live long enough to blow the whistle on them or will she become a museum exhibit herself?

Slightly's fourth adventure (**The Case of the Hidden City**) takes her out of her country for the first time - and out of her depth as well. Paris in the springtime is the City of Art and Artists at its loveliest, but it would seem that there is a sinister side to all this beauty. Rumours of a mysterious organisation called The Hidden City are rife, and when not just paintings, but artists and their models too, start to disappear, no one knows what to think. Could this be a case our detective-in-training just can't solve? Will she be lost forever under the streets of Paris?

At the end of each book there is a section of weird and wonderful facts about the Victorians, such as how best to get a job in the Fire Brigade, or how to behave on an omnibus. There is also a quiz relating to the city and the museum each book is centred around.

Topics for Discussion or Class Projects:

1. Each Slightly Jones Mystery is built around one of the great Victorian museums. Have any of your pupils visited such a museum? What did it look like? Why did the Victorians build so many?
2. Each Slightly Jones story is dedicated to a lesser-known Victorian hero or heroine. Your class could choose their own favourite Victorian and find out about their lives.
3. Each of Slightly's cases is set in a different city. Your class could choose a city and find out what has changed since Slightly's time - and what has stayed the same! Buildings, sewers, underground trains, libraries, hospitals - the Victorians are still with us today.
4. The Victorians were great inventors. They were also enthusiastic developers of ideas and technologies. We have them to thank for many of the things that seem completely ordinary to us now, like electricity, telephones, cameras, toilets. But some of the things they invented were very weird indeed. What about the electric corset? Or the moustache spoon? Or the monowheel? What are the strangest Victorian inventions your class can find?

5. The Victorians would advertise anything! Your class could google “Victorian Ads” and go to the Images site. After looking at some of the ads they might want to draw their own Victorian style advert for some outrageous inventions of their own.
6. I’ve included “A DIY Detective Story Kit” in these notes for your class to use in writing their own mysteries.

To find out more about Slightly Jones and her world, visit Slightly's Notebook -

<http://www.slightlyjones.co.uk/>

A DIY Detective Story Writing Kit

Here's what you'll need ...

1. Some **where** – for the crime to happen. It can be anywhere, from the Queen's bathroom in Buckingham Palace to the far side of the Moon! As long as you can picture it in your mind, you can use it for your story.
2. Some **thing** – that's been stolen. What's in the place you've imagined that a thief might want to snatch?
3. Some **one** – well, several someones. You need a detective – my detective is Slightly Jones. Who's yours? And you'll need some suspects. Who might have stolen the thing you've decided on? Then you need to think about how they got into the place you've imagined. And – this is important - why would they *want* to take the thing, whatever it is?
4. Some **clues** – Your detective can't just shut her eyes and point – she needs something to work on. The most unlikely things can provide the clues your detective desperately needs. There are always the old standards like footprints and fingerprints, but what about the ace of spades from a deck of cards, a dropped fingerless glove or maybe a half-eaten apple? Mysterious!

But then, if you don't want to write a really *boring* detective story, you definitely need one more thing. You need the magic ingredient. You need ...

5. **Misdirection** – You may have heard people talk about “red herrings” and wondered what they were on about. What used to happen was this. If you preserve a herring fish by smoking it, two things happen: 1.) it turns a sort of orangey-red colour and 2.) it gets a really strong smell. What the people who objected to fox hunting in the 19th century sometimes did was tie this smelly red(ish) herring to a string and drag it around where the fox hunt was going to be. When the hounds tried to find the fox they were led astray by the

smell of the fish. Misdirection. And that's what a good detective story needs. Before your detective can get it right, she needs to get it wrong! This makes for hard-working detectives and satisfied readers when, at last, the penny drops, the light bulb goes on, and the real answer is found.

So, there you have it – your very own DIY Detective Story Writing Kit.

Well?

What are you waiting for?

It's great to think that while I'm busy writing my next detective story, you're busy writing yours. Happy writing!

www.joanlennon.co.uk

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