The Big Sleep
Raymond Chandler

Introduction

The story
General Sternwood asks the private detective, Philip Marlowe, to find out who is trying to blackmail him. Sternwood is also sad because Rusty Regan, Vivian’s husband, has disappeared. We learn that both daughters, Vivian and Carmen are wild women.

As part of his investigation, Marlowe goes to the house of Arthur Geiger, a dealer in pornography. There he finds Geiger dead, Carmen drugged and naked, and an empty camera. After taking Carmen home, he goes back only to find Geiger’s body has gone.

Later, the police find the body of Owen Taylor, the Sternwoods’ chauffeur. Geiger’s books have been taken by a Joe Brody, a crook.

Because Vivian has told Marlowe that Regan ran off with the wife of the gangster, Eddie Mars’ wife, Marlowe talks to him but gets no information.

Following a lead, Marlowe goes to Joe Brody’s, where he also finds Agnes, Geiger’s assistant. When Carmen arrives with a gun, Marlowe gets the pictures from Brody in the fight that follows.

Soon after, Brody is shot dead at his door but Marlowe catches the gunman, a boy from Geiger’s store called Carol Lundgren. He takes Carol to Geiger’s house where he finds Geiger’s body. He now calls the police and tells them that Taylor killed Geiger through love for Carmen but Marlowe does not tell them everything. He wants to know what happened to Rusty Regan.

Later, at Eddie Mars’ club, Marlowe sees Vivian win a lot of money and then secretly return it. Back home, he finds Carmen in his bed. He throws her out.

Before Marlowe goes to the garage outside the city where Mona Mars is hiding, Lash Canino, Mars’ man, murders Jones.

At the garage, Canino knocks Marlowe out but Mona Mars sets Marlowe free. He kills Canino soon after.

Finally, Carmen tries to kill Marlowe because he rejected her as Regan rejected her earlier. Now Marlowe knows that she killed Regan and why Vivian has been protecting Carmen so that her father does not learn the truth. But Mars knew too, hence his power over Vivian.

Background to the story
The story line of The Big Sleep is wonderfully complicated and the complexities of the plot and the motives of the numerous characters have delighted readers ever since it was published.

It is a classic of detective fiction particularly because of the tough but honest private detective Philip Marlowe, and the contrast between Marlowe and the often brutal and corrupt Californian environment in which he lives and works.

Raymond Chandler (1888–1959) wrote The Big Sleep in 1939. He is regarded by many as one of the great writers of American detective fiction, if not the greatest. Among his other books, Farewell My Lovely (1940) and The Long Goodbye (1953) are also particularly notable.

Not only is The Big Sleep one of the classic detective novels, it is also one of the great films of the genre. Humphrey Bogart plays the starring role of Marlowe from the 1946 film of the same name, directed by Howard Hawks. The performances of Bogart as Marlowe and of his wife, Lauren Bacall, as Vivian Regan, remain those of one of the great Hollywood couples of all time.
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Pre-reading activity

Match the words with the pictures

To the teacher

Aim: To familiarize students with the setting
Time: 10–20 minutes
Organization: Give one copy of the worksheet to each student or to each pair of students. Ask the students to match the picture with the correct caption.
When they have matched the pictures and the captions, ask them:
1 how many different people appear altogether in the pictures (answer: a lot! get them to pay particular attention to the ones who appear most);
2 who they are or what the relationships between them are.

Then ask them:
1 to look again at the pictures and put them in order as they think they occur in the story (tell them that picture number 1 is also first in the sequence);
2 to predict, in general terms, the story from the pictures (but confess that the story is very complicated!).

Key: 1f, 2b, 3a, 4g, 5h, 6c, 7d, 8e.

a I kicked in a window, and stepped through it into the house.
b The General stared at me. ‘Look at this,’ he said. ‘And have some more brandy.’
c ‘I hate big dark handsome men like you,’ Vivian Regan said. ‘I just hate them.’
d Vivian Regan had sixteen thousand dollars in front of her. A lot of money to lose.
e The big black car had been pulled out of the water onto a boat.
f The girl giggled suddenly, and put her thumb in her mouth like a baby.
g ‘I’m Harry Jones,’ he said. ‘Agnes sent me. I’ve got something to sell.’
h I laughed at her. I walked towards her and she fired the gun at me.
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While reading activity

Character matching

Who are these six characters from The Big Sleep?

Find two more pieces of information in the book about each of them and write them in two of the empty spaces.

Now decide on two more pieces of information about each character which you think could be true and write them in the empty spaces.

1. Had a fat face and a moustache.
   * Lived on Laverne Terrace.
   * Got $3000 from Carmen.

2. Died of a broken neck.
   * Gave Carmen a gun.
   * Was found dead in a car.

3. Drinks whisky for lunch.
   * Married a bootlegger.
   * Is 'intelligent but cruel'.

4. Doesn't like policemen's wives.
   * Has an office on the seventh floor.
   * Took photographs of Carmen.

5. Can't smoke or drink.
   * Used to work in the District Attorney's office.
   * Liked Rusty Regan.

6. Has sharp white teeth.
   * Is 'a selfish child'.
   * Puts her thumb in her mouth.

To the teacher

Where: At the end of Chapter 7

Aim: To focus on descriptions of characters, consolidate knowledge of characters, hypothesize about character and motive

Time: 10–20 minutes

Organization: Get each student to identify the characters referred to in 1–6 and write their names in the central boxes.

Ask students to fill in two more of the empty circles with other information about the same character which they can find in the book.

Ask them to now complete the remaining two empty circles with other information about each character which could also be true about each character, based on how they imagine him or her to be. Get students to compare their additions in pairs and then get feedback from the whole class.

Key: 1 Arthur Geiger; 2 Owen Taylor; 3 Vivian Regan; 4 Philip Marlowe; 5 General Sternwood; 6 Carmen Sternwood.
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After reading activity

Order puzzle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>ORDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a  Geiger’s friend is a killer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b  ‘Find him for me, Marlowe’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c  Mr Geiger’s bookstore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d  Marlowe’s job is finished – or is it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e  Carmen wants her pictures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f  ‘I know where Mona Mars is’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g  Marlowe helps the police</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h  Marlowe meets the Sternwoods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i  Mona Mars helps Marlowe to escape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j  Marlowe meets Eddie Mars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k  Marlowe has woman trouble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l  A dead man disappears</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m  The small man sleeps the big sleep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n  Who killed Owen Taylor?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o  Sleeping the big sleep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To the teacher

Aim: To order, revise, remember what has been read, summarise
Time: 10–20 minutes
Organization: Hand out the worksheet to pairs or groups of students. This is a checking exercise to remind students of how the main story line in the book develops by giving them an opportunity to discuss some of the main incidents and orally to check the chronological order of events.
Key: a7, b14, c2, d9, e6, f11, g8, h1, i13, j5, k10, l3, m12, n4, o15.