The story

Carabiniere Bacci, a trainee police officer, receives a call early one morning just before Christmas from Cipolla, the cleaner at Via Maggio 58 and goes round to find an Englishman called Langley-Smythe dead in his ground floor flat, which is full of antiques. Marshal Guarnaccia, who is ill and so could not take the call, pays a brief visit and says that Cipolla’s wife has just died.

Since Langley-Smythe comes from an important family in Britain, two English detectives arrive to help with the investigation.

A little girl on the second floor says she heard two bangs in the night: one was the sound of the downstairs door and the other was a gunshot.

Eventually, the police conclude that Langley-Smythe was exporting antiques illegally as the fingerprints of several different people have been found on the Englishman’s furniture.

Langley-Smythe had been waiting for someone although nothing had been stolen. Additionally, Miss White from upstairs tells the English police that furniture was often moved in and out of Langley-Smythe’s flat in the middle of the night.

Believing that the antique dealer, Cesarini, from the first floor, is involved in the murder and the illegal trade, the police trap him entering the Englishman’s flat in the middle of the following night with two other men.

But the police have no evidence to link Cesarini with any crime.

Finally, the Marshal sends for Cipolla who tells him that his wife had worked for the Englishman who had refused to pay her. Cipolla had gone there and shot him almost by accident while in a state of anger and grief.

Background to the story

Death of an Englishman was first published in 1981 although there is little in the story to date it very precisely, apart from Cipolla’s age (aged six in 1945, now forty-two). The setting has an Italian flavour as we learn about Italian night-guards, relations between North and South, the illegal export of antiques and so on.

The real interest of Death of an Englishman, apart from the conventional excitement of a good story with lots of action and the enjoyment of searching for clues, lies in the very human portraits of the policemen themselves and of some of the people they deal with. Magdalen Nabb only gradually reveals the character of the Marshal to us: he is presented to us at first through the eyes of Carabiniere Bacci as a fat old man with possible Mafia links. By the end of the book the reader and Bacci both understand that the Marshal is both a good detective and a sensitive man. The world the author describes is an everyday one, where the central crime happens almost by accident and where the central tragedy is that it is the murderer and not the murdered man who is the victim.

Magdalen Nabb was born in 1947. She is the author of a number of detective novels featuring the Marshal, of which this book was her first. She is also the author of a series of stories for very young readers based on another character, Josie Smith.

Before reading

Here are some ways to help your students approach the story:

1. Give students the title of the book and show them the picture on the cover. Ask them to try and guess what kind of story it is.
2. Give students a copy of the text on the back cover of the book, and of the story introduction on the first page. When they have read the texts, ask them a few questions about the story, or use the Before Reading Activities in the back of each Bookworm.
Death of an Englishman

Pre-reading activity

Match the words with the pictures

1. Miss White was delighted to see Carabiniere Bacci again.
2. ‘When Milena still didn’t leave, the Englishman picked up the gun he kept in his desk.’
3. ‘I put the things in a black rubbish bag,’ said the little cleaner. ‘I always do that.’
4. ‘What have I done? Oh, Marshal, what have I done?’ cried Cipolla.
5. A dark figure came towards Bacci out of the fog.
6. ‘But her key is still in the lock!’ the Marshal said.
7. ‘I own the flat. That doesn’t make me a murderer,’ said Cesarini.
8. Cipolla followed the others to the cafe.

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 pair of students. Ask them to match the picture with the correct caption.
When they have finished, ask them:
1. how many different people appear altogether in the pictures (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 the story from the pictures.
Key: 1e, 2g, 3b, 4a, 5c, 6h, 7d, 8f.
Death of an Englishman

While reading activity

Character matching

Who are these six characters from Death of an Englishman?

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 last two spaces.

To the teacher

Where: At the end of Chapter 9
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 Cesarini, 2 Bacci, 3 The Marshal, 4 Cipolla, 5 Giovanna, 6 Langley-Smythe.
**Death of an Englishman**

*After reading activity*

**Order the events**

Number the events in the story in the right order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>ORDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a She died in the night soon afterwards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Cipolla asked Signor Cesarini what he should do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c The Englishman hit him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d Cesarini just laughed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e At 6 o’clock he called the Marshal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f He got angry and picked up his gun.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g Then he sat down and waited.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h Milena asked the Englishman for her money.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i Milena started working for the Englishman.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j Cipolla went to see the Englishman.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k Cipolla picked up the Englishman’s gun and shot him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l The Englishman did not pay her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**To the teacher**

**Aim:** To order, revise, remember what has been read, summarize

**Time:** 10–20 minutes

**Organization:** Give out the worksheets to pairs or groups of students. You can present this activity as a kind of detective exercise as well, since students will have to check the events in the book in order to work out the chronological order of events. Once they have done this, you can also ask students in groups to tell the story in the order in which the events actually took place.

**Key:** 1i, 2l, 3b, 4d, 5h, 6f, 7a, 8j, 9c, 10k, 11g, 12e.