The story
The story takes place over six days.

1 Alex Dinon has escaped from prison where he was being held for the murder of the old President. The Chief of Police, Eva Hine, tells Felix, a young inspector, that the new President wants Dinon back in prison at once.

2 An old woman, Marta, gives Alex food, clothing and shelter for the night. Meanwhile, the President phones Eva Hine. She tells Felix that she wants Dinon dead or alive but she will not let him talk to people in the prison about how he escaped. Felix begins to ask himself questions which he cannot answer.

3 Alex has been seen so he has to leave Marta’s house. When Felix and his colleague Adam arrive, Marta tells them that Alex Dinon does not have a murderer’s face but that the new President does.

4 Local people help Alex to escape from a food shop with the police outside. Then a lorry driver hides him in the back of his lorry. When Felix arrives at the shop, the people tell him that Dinon is not the murderer. Felix doesn’t understand why the people are helping Dinon. Adam is not interested in this kind of question.

5 Alex joins his wife, Olivia, in a friend’s house. He says he knows who murdered the old President but that this is very dangerous information. The police find out where he is. Eva tells Felix that three hundred soldiers are going to the house. Felix is angry.

6 Alex is shot and killed leaving the house. Felix had wanted to talk to Dinon. He asks the Chief of Police who killed the President. She tells him not to ask questions but he says he is going to find the answer and leaves her office for the last time.

Background to the story
The President’s Murderer does not have a ‘background’ in the normal sense since the setting is deliberately neutral: there is nothing in the names or the places to tell us where the story is happening. It could be anywhere where the rule of law is under threat; where politicians, army or police might be tempted to take the law into their own hands. In fact, the very absence of other details helps readers to focus their attention on the main issues which are presented through the situation and through the reactions of the different characters.

The story is about right and wrong and about the abuse of power, and involves adventure and the combat between good and evil. There is strong dramatic tension in the way we gradually begin to ask ourselves the same questions which Felix begins to ask; and in our gradual realization that perhaps Alex has been allowed to escape deliberately so that the President – the one who is really responsible for the death of the old President – can make Alex’s death look like the shooting of a dangerous fugitive. At another level it is interesting to see how the various characters react in very different ways to the situation, for example:

A Eva Hine, a cold and ruthless woman who seems to have little concern for right and wrong;

B Felix, the young policeman who finds himself increasingly questioning what he is being asked to do;

C His younger colleague Adam, in contrast, who has no such qualms of conscience;

D The brave Marta who risks her own safety to help Alex and to tell the police what she thinks; as well as Alex Dinon himself and his wife, Olivia, the victims of the situation.
The President’s Murderer

Pre-reading activity

Match the words with the pictures

a  ‘You’re a wonderful woman, Marta,’ Alex said. ‘Goodbye and thank you.’

b  ‘How did you escape from prison?’ Marta asked suddenly.

c  ‘I can’t stay any longer,’ Alex said. ‘Perhaps the police are out there now.’

d  Felix and Adam asked a lot of questions in that small town, but they learned nothing.

e  ‘But I did not kill the President,’ Alex said. ‘And the police know that.’

f  ‘What are you saying? You lost him?’ the Chief of Police said angrily.

g  The trees were a hundred metres away . . . fifty . . . twenty

h  ‘What are you doing in my field, young man?’ the old woman said.

i  ‘And why do you work for the police, young man?’ Marta said.

To the teacher

Aim: To familiarize students with the setting

Time: 15–20 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 the following questions. Who is Alex? Who is Marta? Who are Felix and Adam?

Key: 1g, 2d, 3a, 4c, 5h, 6i, 7e, 8f, 9b

Once you have gone through the answers to matching the pictures, ask the students to look again at the pictures and put them in the order they think they occur in the story (tell them that picture number 1 is also first in the sequence); to predict, in general terms, the story from the pictures. There is no right or wrong answer to this exercise. Students may suggest sequences of pictures which are different from the book’s. This does not matter as long as the stories they suggest are also plausible.
Choose a number between 1 and 5 to show how good you think each character is.

1 = bad
2 = quite bad
3 = not good or bad
4 = quite good
5 = good

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<th>AT THE END OF THE THIRD DAY</th>
<th>AT THE END OF THE SIXTH DAY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex Dinon</td>
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<td>Eva Hines</td>
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<td>Felix</td>
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<td>Adam</td>
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<td>Olivia</td>
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<td>Marta</td>
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**To the teacher**

Where: (1) At the end of The Third Day, (2) and again at the end of The Sixth Day
Aim: To assess moral character
Time: 15–30 minutes
Organization: Hand out the worksheet or show it on the overhead projector. Then ask the students in pairs or groups to award points out of five on the basis of how good or bad they think each character is. You can, if you wish, total all the scores to get a final order based on the students’ judgements so far. Encourage students to give their reasons for what they say. Keep a record of what students have said at this stage and then at the end of The Sixth Day, repeat the exercise. If there have been any major movements or changes of opinion, ask students to explain why.
The President’s Murderer

After reading activity

What happens next?

It is the end of the book but not the end of the story. Alex Dinon is dead and Felix is not a policeman now. The story goes on like this:

**The truth**

Felix was a good policeman. He was good at asking questions. He was good at talking to people. Now he was not a policeman but he talked to many people. He talked to Marta, to Olivia, to Alex Dinon’s friends, to the people in the prison. He asked a lot of questions. And one day he said, ‘Now I know who murdered the old President.’

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**To the teacher**

**Aim:** To write an alternative ending

**Time:** 15–30 minutes

**Organization:** Go through the text with the class. Then ask pairs or groups of students to talk in general terms about what happens next and what the different people in the story do, without specifying which characters they should talk about. When each group has developed some idea about a final ending, ask each pair or group to consider specifically what one of the characters in questions 1–6 below does:

1. What does Felix do?
2. What does the new President do?
3. What does Olivia do?
4. What does Marta do?
5. What does Adam do?
6. What does the Chief of Police do?

Explain that soon many people know that Felix knows something important. With their groups, ask students to talk about what happens then and what the different people in the story do. Then ask each pair or group to write their ending on the worksheet. Alternatively instead of writing, invite each pair or group to report back to the whole class to compare their endings.