

Dr Bartholomew Cuttle wasn't the kind of man who mysteriously disappeared. He was the kind of man who read enormous old books at the dinner table and got fried egg stuck in his beard. He was the kind of man who always lost his keys, and never took an umbrella on rainy days. He was the kind of dad who might be five minutes late picking you up from school, but he always came. More than anything else, Darkus knew his dad was not the kind of father who would abandon his thirteen-year-old son.

The police report stated that the 27th of September had been an unremarkable Tuesday. Dr Bartholomew Cuttle, a 48-year-old widower, had taken his son, Darkus Cuttle, to school and gone on to the Natural History Museum, where he was the Director of Science. He'd greeted his secretary Margaret at nine-thirty, spent a morning in meetings discussing museum business, and eaten lunch at one o'clock with an ex-colleague, Professor Andrew Appleyard. In the afternoon he'd gone down to the collection vaults, as he frequently would, via the coffee machine, where he'd filled his cup. He'd exchanged pleasantries with Eddie, the security guard on duty that day, walked down the corridor to the vaults and locked himself in one of the entomology rooms.

That evening, when his father didn't come home, Darkus alerted the neighbours and they called the police.

When the police arrived at the museum, the room Dr Cuttle had entered was locked from the inside. Fearing he may have suffered a heart attack, or had an accident, they produced a steel battering ram and smashed the door open.

The room was empty.



Comprehension and vocabulary

1. What job does Dr Bartholomew Cuttle have?
2. What does the word *unremarkable* mean? (paragraph 2)
3. The police report described Dr Cuttle as a friendly but forgetful man. What evidence in the text that supports this description?

Techniques and effect

4. What genre do you think this story is? Give two pieces of evidence from the text to support your answer.
5. Do you think this is an effective opening to a story? Why do you think this? Give specific evidence from the text to support your answer. (*Don't just put, "it makes the reader want to read on" – explain why!*)

Extended writing

6. Write the opening to a mystery/crime story of your own. Write no more than one side of A4 (two pages of an A5 exercise book). Don't worry about what the solution to the mystery might be – focus on writing an effective opening that engages the reader right from the beginning.