🦉 Concord Homework: Reading & Grammar Masterclass

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Part 1: Reading Text

The Ghost on the Beach: The Mystery of the Somerton Man

A Body on the Sand

On the early morning of December 1, 1948, the sun was just beginning to rise over Somerton Beach in Adelaide, Australia. Two people riding their horses along the shore stumbled upon a baffling scene. Slumped against the seawall was the lifeless body of a middle-aged man. He was impeccably dressed in a suit, a tie, and polished shoes—bizarre attire for a warm morning on the sand. An unlit cigarette rested gently on his collar. Authorities initially assumed he must have suffered a sudden heart attack during the night, but the complete lack of physical trauma, illness, or signs of a struggle quickly turned a routine discovery into one of the most perplexing mysteries of the 20th century.

The Man with No Identity

When the police transported the body to the morgue, the strange anomalies began to multiply. The man possessed absolutely no identification. In his pockets, he carried a half-empty packet of chewing gum, an unused train ticket, a bus ticket, and some matches. More disturbingly, investigators discovered that all the manufacturer's labels on his clothing had been meticulously cut out with scissors. His dental records matched absolutely no one in Australia, and his fingerprints yielded no results in international databases. The local authorities should have been able to identify a well-dressed man in such a populated area, but he was completely untraceable. He was, for all intents and purposes, a ghost.

The Hidden Pocket and the Secret Code

Months later, a pathologist re-examining the man's clothing made a startling discovery. Hidden deep within the lining of his trousers was a tiny, secret pocket. Inside this pocket was a tightly rolled scrap of paper bearing two printed words: *Taman Shud*. Translating to "It is ended" or "Finished" in Persian, the phrase was torn from a rare edition of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, a 12th-century book of poetry.

Following a nationwide police appeal, a man came forward with the exact book from which the slip had been torn, claiming he had found it tossed into the back seat of his unlocked car near

the beach. In the back of this book, police found faint pencil markings. It was a cryptographic code consisting of five lines of random capital letters. To this day, the world's most brilliant cryptographers and intelligence agencies have failed to decipher it.

The Spy Hypothesis

Given the era—the dawn of the Cold War—and the proximity of a top-secret uranium mine and rocket testing facility near Adelaide, rumors of espionage began to swirl. Toxicologists concluded that the man could have been poisoned with a rare, undetectable toxin that dissipates quickly in the bloodstream. His enlarged spleen and congested liver strongly suggested acute poisoning, yet no trace of any known substance was ever found in his system. If he were a Soviet or foreign spy, his handlers might have assassinated him to prevent him from revealing state secrets. His pristine physical condition—he had the pronounced calf muscles of a ballet dancer or a seasoned runner—only fueled the theory that he was a highly trained operative.

An Enduring Enigma

For over seven decades, the Somerton Man rested in an Adelaide cemetery beneath a tombstone that simply reads, "Here lies the unknown man who was found at Somerton Beach." Despite modern exhumations and advanced DNA testing attempting to link him to a specific family tree, the core questions of the case remain frustratingly unanswered. Why was he on that beach? Who tore the words *Taman Shud* from the poetry book? And what did the unbreakable code mean? We may never fully unravel the truth behind his final moments, leaving the Somerton Man as a permanent fixture in the annals of unsolved historical mysteries.

The Psychology of Human Behavior: The Need for Cognitive Closure

When examining why the Somerton Man case has obsessed the public for decades, we must look at a psychological concept known as the **Need for Cognitive Closure (NFC)**.

Cognitive closure is the human desire for a firm answer to a question and an aversion toward ambiguity. The human brain is a pattern-recognizing machine; it hates missing pieces. When faced with an unsolved mystery—especially one involving bizarre clues like cut-out labels and unbreakable codes—our brains experience psychological discomfort. To alleviate this discomfort, people construct elaborate theories (such as the international spy hypothesis). The brain prefers a spectacular, complicated theory over the uncomfortable reality of simply "not knowing." The Somerton Man lacks closure, which is exactly why the human mind refuses to let the story die.

Part 2: Vocabulary Check

Match the vocabulary words (1-6) with their correct definitions (A-F).

1. ___ Baffling
2. ___ Impeccably
3. ___ Anomaly
4. ___ Decipher
5. ___ Espionage
6. ___ Exhumation

A. Something that deviates from what is standard, normal, or expected.

B. The action of digging up something buried, especially a corpse.

C. Impossible to understand; completely confusing or perplexing.

D. In accordance with the highest standards; faultlessly or flawlessly.

E. To succeed in understanding, interpreting, or identifying something (like a code).

F. The practice of spying or of using spies, typically by governments.

Part 3: Grammar Spotlight - Past Modals of Deduction

Target Structure: Past Modals of Deduction (*must have, might have, could have*)

From the text: *"Authorities initially assumed he must have suffered a sudden heart attack..."*

In true crime and historical mysteries, investigators rarely have 100% of the facts. Past modals of deduction allow the speaker to express varying degrees of certainty about past events.

- **Must have:** Shows a strong logical conclusion based on evidence.
- **Might have / Could have:** Expresses possibility or theories when evidence is lacking.
- **Should have:** Expresses an obligation or expectation in the past that was not met.
- **Couldn't have:** Expresses a strong deduction that something was impossible.

Practice Activity: The Detective's Report

Instructions: You are the lead detective on a new, unsolved case. Complete the sentences below using the correct past modal of deduction (**must have, might have, couldn't have, or should have**) + the **past participle** of the verb in parentheses.

1. The museum vault was locked from the inside. The thief _____ (escape) through the ventilation shaft! It's the only way out.

2. We aren't entirely sure why she left her car running, but she _____ (see) something that frightened her.
3. The victim _____ (fight) back, because there were no bruises or defensive wounds on his body at all.
4. The security guard _____ (check) the cameras at midnight, but he fell asleep at his desk instead.
5. The ransom note was written in Russian, so the kidnappers _____ (be) from Eastern Europe, but it could also be a clever distraction.
6. He _____ (know) the killer. The front door was unlocked and there was no sign of a break-in.
7. I _____ (bring) my heavy coat to the crime scene; it's freezing out here on the beach tonight!

Part 4: Critical Thinking & Discussion

Instructions: Based on the reading text and the psychological concept of "Cognitive Closure," write a short paragraph answering the following question:

If the Somerton Man was not a spy, what is another logical explanation for the cut-out clothing labels, the secret pocket, and the unbreakable code? How does the "Need for Cognitive Closure" affect your own theory?

_____

_____

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Teacher's Answer Key

Part 2: Vocabulary Check

1. **C** (Baffling)
2. **D** (Impeccably)
3. **A** (Anomaly)
4. **E** (Decipher)
5. **F** (Espionage)
6. **B** (Exhumation)

Part 3: The Detective's Report

1. **must have escaped** (Strong deduction; only one logical possibility)
2. **might have seen / could have seen** (A possibility/theory)
3. **couldn't have fought** (Strong deduction that something is impossible based on evidence)
4. **should have checked** (A past obligation or expectation that was not fulfilled)
5. **might have been / could have been** (A possibility, but with doubt)
6. **must have known** (Strong deduction based on the unlocked door)
7. **should have brought** (Expressing regret about a past action)