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Speculation and deduction
by Stephanie Valerio

Age:	Teenagers and adults
Level:	Upper intermediate
Time:	60–90 minutes
Objective:	To teach past and present modal verbs of speculation and deduction
Key skills:	Grammar, speaking
Materials:	One copy of Worksheets 1, 2 and 3 per student (fold Worksheet 2 where shown); one copy of Worksheet 4 per student (or alternatively, project it onto the board); one set of speaking cards for every two or three students

Procedure

1. Hand out Worksheet 1. Ask students to discuss the girl and her life, using their imaginations. They should come up with some things like, 'She is rich. She has been shopping. Maybe she has a husband or children …'

2. Hand out Worksheet 2, folded at the dotted line so students can't see the bottom half of the worksheet. Ask students to match the beginnings and endings of the sentences. Point out that there may be several correct answers. Check the answers with the class.

   Key (suggested answers): 1. g; 2. a; 3. e/f; 4. h; 5. e/f; 6. b/d/i; 7. j; 8. b/d/i; 9. c/h; 10. b/d/i

3. By this stage, students should have recognized some of the modal verbs and will hopefully have successfully paired the *have* beginnings with the past participle endings. If necessary, elicit that all the sentences contain modal verbs and that these modal verbs are being used to imagine, speculate or deduce information.

4. Ask students to unfold the paper, and tell them that here they have the grammatical explanations for the modal verbs they have seen in the previous activity. Ask students to work together to match each form with its function. Check the answers with the class.

   Key: 1. a; 2. c; 3. c; 4. c; 5. e; 6. f; 7. d; 8. d; 9. d; 10. b; 11. b

   There is actually a very subtle difference between *can't have done* and *couldn't have done*, but this doesn't need to be dealt with at this level.

5. Give out Worksheet 3. Tell students that sometimes the difference between using one modal verb or another is quite subtle. Use this activity to highlight some common errors and subtleties of the grammar. Ask students to discuss the difference between each group of sentences and feed back with the class.

   Key:

   1. *Answer a and b are the same. Answer c is incorrect: 'can' cannot be used in speculation and deduction.*

   2. *Answer b is an incorrect sentence. While 'might' and 'could' both refer to something being possible in the present, 'could not' does not refer to something being possible in the present. It has to be combined with 'have' + past participle and has a past meaning.*

   3. *Answers a and b mean the same.*

   4. *Both are correct. Answer a refers to something that was possible in the past, but we're not sure, whereas b refers to something that the speaker thinks definitely didn't happen in the past.*

   5. *Use this to highlight the fact that sometimes the only difference is in how much doubt the speaker has. In answer a, the speaker is confident they know the baby's age (maybe the speaker is a paediatrician or nursery worker), whereas in answer b, the speaker is unsure, as most people are when guessing the age of small babies.*

   6. *They are both correct. Answer b is an incorrect sentence. You can't use 'mustn't' to talk about something that you are sure is not true, either in the present or the past.*

6. Go through the pronunciation of the modal verbs with the students. I like to do this before a gapfill activity, otherwise when students are talking about their answers to an activity, they are reinforcing bad pronunciation. Model and drill the weak form of *have* in the past modal forms:

   She **might've/might have** gone shopping. = /maɪtəv/

   It **couldn't've/couldn't have** been him = /kʊd(ə)ntəv/

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7. Ask students to work together to complete Worksheet 4. Alternatively, project it onto the board so that students have a break from worksheets, and it also allows the class to get more involved in raising doubts about answers. You could also set it for homework.

   Key:

   1. must have been

   2. might not have done / may not have done. ('Can't have done' is also possible.)

   3. can't have done / couldn't have done

   4. may have had / could have had / might have had

   5. can't be

   6. must be

   7. could be / might be / may be

8. Put students into groups of two or three, and give each group a set of speaking cards, placed face down. One person in the group takes a card and reads out the 'A' sentence. The other student(s) have to think of an appropriate way to respond, using a modal verb.

   You might like to elicit an example from the class first to give them an idea of how to do the activity. In a speech bubble, write, for example 'Why isn't Jill here today?' In another speech bubble, elicit ways of responding, for example 'She might be ill' or 'She might not have remembered that we have class today.'

   Explain that each card contains a 'suggested answer' in case students get stuck but that any answer that makes sense and contains a modal verb is acceptable. The student who has taken the card decides whether a response is suitable or not. Students take it in turns to take cards.

   Monitor closely during this activity to check that students are using the modal verbs correctly and if possible, with correct pronunciation.

9. Conduct a feedback session, where you ask a student from one group to read a sentence A and a student from another group to respond.

Optional extension activities

1. Find pictures of people on the internet (not well-known celebrities), and ask students to speculate about them. They can say things like 'She might be Russian', 'He can't be over 40 years old' or She must have had plastic surgery.'

2. Students write the names of well-known celebrities on slips of paper and put them into a hat. They take it in turns to pull one out and describe who it is for the other students to guess, using modal verbs to speculate about what they are doing or have done today, for example 'This person might be eating lunch with other politicians now. He might have had meetings this morning, and he must have had breakfast with Melania.'

3. Play Candida Palma's winning lesson share entry, Figure It Out! – www.onestopenglish.com/community/lesson-share/winning-lessons/grammar-and-vocabulary/grammar-figure-it-out/145109.article.

4. Play the murder mystery card game. You need at least eight students in the class for this.

   Using an ordinary deck of cards, take two Kings and as many other non-picture cards as students. So if you have a class of eight students, you will have two Kings and six non-picture cards. Deal them out to your students. They can look at their own card but must keep it secret.

   You, the teacher, are the narrator/village mayor. Your script goes something like this:

   'Hello residents of Biggletown, and thank you for coming to this village meeting. I am the village mayor, and I have some terrible news. Last night, old Mrs Higgle was brutally murdered. She was found in her house this morning. *[Give as many gory details as you like, depending on the class.]* We don't know exactly who did it, but we do know that there were two murderers and that they are both here with us now, in this very room.' *[Now, in your normal,*

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non-mayor voice, tell the students that if they have a King, they are a murderer. If not, they are a regular resident of the village.]

'To help us find out who the murderers are, we need to know why it couldn't possibly have been you. I hope you all have strong alibis.'

Tell students that they now each have to give a reason why it couldn't have been them. Model the structure: 'I couldn't have killed Mrs Higgle because I was at the cinema last night with my boyfriend. / I couldn't have killed Mrs Higgle because she was like a grandma to me. I loved her very much.' Encourage the other students to interrogate each other to make it more dynamic. Go round the class, with each student giving their alibi. After everyone has spoken, resume the script.

'So now we have heard what everyone has to say, everyone must vote for one person they think is the murderer. The person with the most votes must reveal their card.' *[Everyone votes, using the structure 'I think [Juan] must be the murderer' / 'I think [Chiho] must have killed Mrs Higgle', and the most-voted-for student reveals their card. React accordingly when the student is revealed to be the murderer or a village resident.]*

'It is now night time, it's been a long day, so everyone go to sleep and come back tomorrow.' *[Tell all the students to close their eyes. Then tell the two murderers to open their eyes and SILENTLY agree, by pointing, on someone else in the class that they are going to 'murder'.]*

'Ok, good morning. Open your eyes, everyone. Thanks for coming back again. I'm afraid I have rather bad news. Last night, [name of student] was killed, just like Mrs Higgle. So we still have to discover who is committing these terrible crimes in our village.'

You now repeat the same procedure, each person giving their alibi and voting again at the end of the day. Unfortunately, the murdered student is now dead so cannot speak. Repeat the voting and the revealing of the card.

You can improvise as much as necessary to add drama to the activity. If necessary, everyone closes their eyes again and the murderers kill someone else. This can happen until you feel the game is running out of steam or the murderers have been discovered.

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Lesson Share WORKSHEET 2
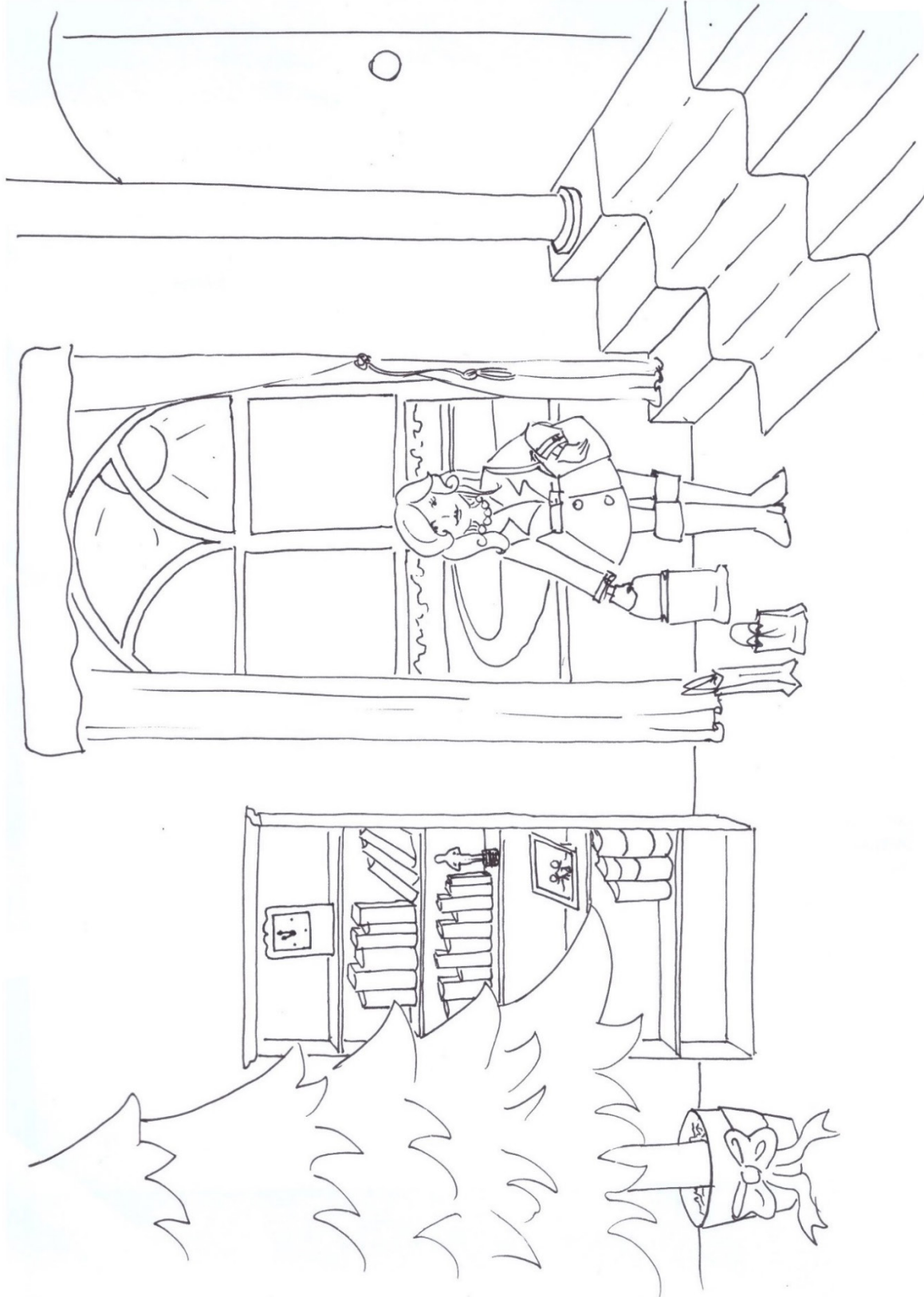
1. Look at the picture on Worksheet 1, and match the beginnings and ends of the sentences.

1.	It must …	a. been shopping.
2.	She must have …	b. be an actress.
3.	She could have …	c. had lunch yet.
4.	She can't have …	d. be married.
5.	She might have …	e. bought decorations for the tree.
6.	She may …	f. bought Christmas presents.
7.	She can't …	g. be Christmas time.
8.	She might …	h. bought a guitar.
9.	She couldn't have …	i. be 25 years old.
10.	She could …	j. be very poor.

--- Fold here ---

2. Match the modal verbs with their meanings. (Some of the verbs have the same meanings.)

1.	*must* + verb (infinitive without *to*)	a. something you are sure is true (in the present)
2.	*may* + verb (infinitive without *to*)	b. something that you are sure didn't happen (in the past)
3.	*might* + verb (infinitive without *to*)	c. something that you think is a possibility (in the present)
4.	*could* + verb (infinitive without *to*)	d. something that you think was a possibility (in the past)
5.	*can't* + verb (infinitive without *to*)	e. something that you are sure is not true (in the present)
6.	*must have* + past participle	f. something that you are sure was true (in the past)
7.	*might have* + past participle	
8.	*may have* + past participle	
9.	*could have* + past participle	
10.	*can't have* + past participle	
11.	*couldn't have* + past participle	

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Are all the sentences in each group correct? If so, is there a difference in meaning?

1

a. What is this present?! It might be a teddy bear.

b. What is this present?! It may be scarf.

c. What is this present? It can be a jumper.

2

a. Angela isn't eating her dinner – she might not be hungry.

b. Angela isn't eating her dinner – she could not be hungry.

3

a. She might have bought jewellery from Tiffany's.

b. She could have bought jewellery from Tiffany's.

4

a. She might not have gone shopping alone.

b. She couldn't have gone shopping alone.

5

a. What a cute baby! She must be about two months old.

b. What a cute baby! She might be about two months old.

6

a. From a distance, that guy looks like Dad, but it can't be him because he's at work.

b. From a distance, that guy looks like Dad, but it mustn't be him because he's at work.

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Complete the sentences with a modal verb and the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. A few years ago, I lost my job and my wife was ill.
   Oh dear, that _____ (be) a very difficult time for you.

2. Annie can't come out because she's grounded, but I don't know why. She
   _____ (do) very well in her exams.

3. I thought it was my next-door neighbour who broke my fence but he
   _____ (do) it because apparently, he was on holiday last week.

4. I'm not sure why James and Lucy were so quiet at dinner tonight. They
   _____ (have) an argument perhaps.

5. I heard that Maggie had broken up with her boyfriend, but she
   _____ (be) that sad about it now because she's already seeing
   someone else.

6. So the insurance company is paying for the damage to your car? You
   _____ (be) so relieved!

7. I can't find my notebook anywhere. I suppose it _____ (be) on my
   desk at home, but I swear I looked there and I didn't see it.

Lesson Share WORKSHEET 4

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Lesson Share SPEAKING CARDS

A: I've been studying for hours!

Suggested answer:
B: You must be tired!

A: What do you think the Queen watches on TV?

Suggested answer:
B: She might watch Masterchef.

A: Who is that man who has the paparazzi chasing after him?

Suggested answer:
B: It could be Brad Pitt!

A: Did the police find out who burgled the old lady in the village?

Suggested answer:
B: They think it might have been local teenagers.

A: You took my textbook home yesterday!

Suggested answer:
B: It couldn't have been me! I didn't have class with you yesterday.

A: Hmm, a square-shaped Christmas present … What could it be?

Suggested answer:
B: It may be a DVD.

A: Look at my new real pearl necklace!

Suggested answer:
B: It must have been very expensive.

A: Look at that poor homeless man with only one blanket in December.

Suggested answer:
B: He can't be very warm or comfortable.

1