

## The True Story Behind "Prize in a Purloined Purse" TEACHER PAGE

This extension activity is for use with the [Mini-Mystery Progressive Puzzle: Prize in a Purloined Purse](#). The four-puzzle set is a "crack-the-case" mystery in which a woman's purse has been stolen, and the contents of the handbag include a winning lottery ticket. Students work to "catch" the thief when he attempts to cash in the ticket.

The puzzle plot is based on an actual crime that took place in Spain in 2020. **Students can read about the true story in the handout provided (next page).** A word bank is included to help students with challenging vocabulary.



### EXTENSIONS for CRITICAL THINKING

Once students have read about the true crime, give them several minutes to jot down questions they have. What would they like to know that wasn't mentioned in the story? Questioning is a big part of what police do in an investigation and what attorneys do during the discovery phase of a trial. If time allows, you might like to share [this kid-friendly map of the criminal justice system](#).

Discuss questions and possible answers. Then, use these additional questions to get students thinking critically.

#### ❖ WHO WAS IMPACTED BY THE CRIME? HOW WERE THEY IMPACTED?

##### Possible responses:

- the woman – (primary victim) emotional distress; loss of a large sum of money (which may have affected her family); her future behavior when in public will likely be affected; the stolen money used in the sale may be difficult to recover or it may take a long time to recover it
- restaurant owner – may have lost future customers due to any publicity related to the incident
- the police – resources used in solving the case are taken from other cases; the time between the crime and arrest was over five months and several people may have been working on the case
- the lottery organizers – not seriously affected or liable (see next question) but may consider changes such as educating ticket holders about how they can protect themselves from theft
- previous owner of the home sold (possibly a financial institution)– the home may be seized during the investigation; may be forced to return money gained from the sale to the victim
- neighbors in Alzira – shock or distress if they befriended the thief, not knowing he was a thief

#### ❖ WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE LOTTERY ORGANIZATION?

Prizes are awarded by lottery organizations to the one who presents the winning ticket. However, a ticket can be invalidated if the serial number is reported stolen prior to the drawing. In the Spanish Christmas Lottery, people claiming larger cash prizes, such as in this case, must go to a bank and show identification. Ticket holders can protect their ownership by noting the serial numbers on the tickets and keeping receipts showing where and when tickets were purchased.

#### ❖ WHY WAS THE SUSPECT RELEASED FROM CUSTODY? DID HE GO TO JAIL and FOR HOW LONG?

When people are charged with a crime in the United States, they are entitled to a trial. According to our justice system, suspects are considered "innocent until proven guilty," and at a trial, evidence must be presented to prove a person's guilt. The criminal justice system is similar in Spain. When suspects are charged, they may be released or held until trial, depending on the severity of the crime. Smaller thefts, in which the property stolen is less than €400, are called *petty thefts*, but this theft would be classified as an *aggravated theft* because the stolen property had a greater value. It can carry a prison sentence of up to 5 years in Spain. In this specific case, information about the subsequent trial and outcome could not be found through online research. If you find additional information, please send a [message](#).

[The Spanish Christmas Lottery](#), which began in December of 1812, is the one of the oldest and largest lottery drawings in the world, and many people participate as part of their Christmas traditions. On more than on occasion, an entire town or village has won the lottery and divided up the prize money.

[Google Earth Link to Valencia, Spain](#)

## *The True Story Behind* Prize in a Purloined Purse

On December 19, 2020, a woman was dining in a restaurant in Novelda, a small town in Spain. As many women do, she had hung her handbag on her chair.

According to the security camera footage, a man, who appeared to be talking on his phone, walked by the woman's chair. He took her purse, hid it under his jacket, and then left the restaurant.

When the woman realized what had happened, she reported the theft to the police, explaining that the contents of her purse included €950 (\$1,155) in cash.

Three days later, the El Gordo Lottery announced the winner of its special Christmas drawing. That's when the woman realized she had a winning lottery ticket in her purse, so she contacted the police, and they added that to their report. As it turned out, the ticket in the purse had indeed won the second-place prize worth €125,000 (\$152,006).

Fast forward to May 31, 2021. Police arrested a 52-year-old man in Alzira, Spain for theft. The man had allegedly used earnings from a lottery ticket to purchase a house there, and it was at that home that he was arrested. The man, who had a history of theft, was charged and later released from custody.

### Vocabulary

**purloined** – stolen

**Euro** – official currency (money) used in many European countries. The symbol for Euros is €.

**lottery** – a fundraiser in which tickets are sold for prizes

**allegedly** – supposedly

**charged** – formally accused of a crime

**custody** – detention; imprisonment

### Questions I Have

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