Establish the Premise

Leave yourself at least a full hour from the closing of the library to the start of the program. Use this time to transform your space from a mild-mannered library to the scene of a deadly crime!

When guests begin to arrive, gather them together in a central spot or meeting room. Don’t let them get close to the scenes and clues just yet! First, you want to establish the premise so they understand how to play the game and what to look for. Once most people have arrived, set the scene for the evening with a speech like this:

“Welcome to this special Valentine’s Day weekend production by Library Theater! We're so glad you could come.

However, there’s been a change of plans this evening. You were supposed to watch a romantic and heartrending drama by our skilled local actors and crew, but something terrible has happened! The star actor, Austin Jane, has been murdered—stabbed through the heart. He was killed right on the stage during our final rehearsal just moments ago. The lights went out, there was a scream, and when the lights came on, Austin was dead with a knife in his heart! All the actors and crew had an opportunity, so they have been taken to the police station for questioning.

But as library users, everyone knows you have the sharpest minds in town. The police want your help. You must search the library for clues. There are a few areas around the library that the theater was using heavily, so you may want to start there. But don’t forget about the rest of the library—you never know where a deranged and desperate murderer may have left clues!

There are a few ground rules to observe. The suspects had no access to [fill in any areas patrons shouldn’t go, like staff areas, another floor of the library, etc.], so we won’t be searching there. Also, when you find a clue, please put it back as you found it, so other sleuths can draw their own conclusions!

Are there any questions?

When the police have finished taking the suspects’ statements, we will gather together again and hear from them.

Make sure you take a program that was meant for the performance tonight. It will help you as you try to figure out who has done this terrible deed!

Good luck! I will let you know when the suspects’ statements have been taken.”
Participants pick up a copy of the program from the theater production that was “supposed” to happen that night. It has photographs and short bios of the cast and crew—the victim and the suspects. It reads:

**Actors**

- **Austin Jane**, our star! The dashing gentleman is a well-known actor with good looks, charisma, and a way with the ladies. Sorry girls, he is married to our director, Bea Goode. His favorite book is *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell.
- **Holly Wood**, beautiful young ingénue. Our lovely leading lady has recently joined the company. Her favorite book is *Good in Bed* by Jennifer Weiner.
- **Hugh Mann**, supporting actor. The company can’t imagine what we would do without Hugh there to play all our bit parts in every production! He would like to thank his sister Anita for always supporting him and for serving as a volunteer usher. He likes to listen to Shakespeare on audiobook.

**Production Crew**

- **Bea Goode**, director and producer. The wife of our esteemed star, Austin Jane, is sadly directing her last production with us! Her favorite book is *Divorce & Money: How to Make the Best Financial Decisions During Divorce* by Violet Woodhouse.
- **Justin Thyme**, stage manager. He can usually be found wearing all black, staring intently at his script of the play. Thanks to Justin for taking the lead and keeping all our productions running smoothly. He would like to thank Holly for inspiring him every day. His favorite book is *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro.
- **Anita Mann**, volunteer usher. She would like to thank Austin Jane for uplifting the souls of so many with his brilliant performances. Thank you, Anita, for never missing a single show or rehearsal! Her favorite book is *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy.
Search for Clues

The participants can now search the library for clues. The librarian will have set up three scenes, each with clues and red herrings hidden inside. People may search them in any order. The scenes are:

- The crime scene (the stage)
- The dressing room
- Backstage

Clues are also hidden in the library stacks.

Decorate each scene to make it look as realistic as possible. The clues that must be concealed in each scene are:

THE CRIME SCENE (THE STAGE)

*Chairs are set around a stage set up for a performance. A small stage or a rug designates the performance area. Set up the onstage “scene” how you like, perhaps with a small sofa and a table with a lamp. A curtain is a big bonus!*

*On the stage there is a masking tape outline of a body.*

1. Near the outline of the body is a blackmail note, folded to imply it fell out of Austin’s pocket. It says “I found your letter. I know what you did. Give me what I want or I will tell the world.” The letters are cutouts from a magazine, pasted on.
2. The blackmail note is clipped to a letter from Holly. The letter has been torn up and taped back together. It says:

   Dearest Austin,

   I’m so glad we found each other. It’s a dream come true. I know you don’t want your wife to find out yet, so I understand that we must keep our meetings secret. It’s hard, but I feel like I have already waited my whole life; I can wait a little longer.

   Let’s meet at the library on [fill in the date of your event] at [fill in a time a few hours before your event].

   All my love,

   Holly
3. A “bloody” knife [ketchup works fine] sits by the body.
4. A photo of Holly with Austin at the library, being used as a bookmark in Bea's favorite book, which she left in her purse under her chair in the audience.

Backstage

This area has a podium and stool for the stage manager, as well as the prop table. The stage manager’s podium has his headset and anything else he’ll need while calling the show—maybe a bottle of water, for example. The prop table is plain and utilitarian, with spaces taped out and labeled for each prop. Backstage, junk is scattered around—ladders, cables, old props, and costumes, etc.

1. Justin's script is on his podium. He has doodled Holly's name all over it with little hearts.
2. A knife is missing from the prop table. (Squares are taped out on the table for each prop; each square is labeled with masking tape. The square for “Knife” is empty.)

The Dressing Room

Each character has his or her own space, labeled with a name tag. This area is much more sumptuous than the backstage scene. Mirrors, costume pieces, jewelry, makeup, etc., hang on the walls and sit on the tables, revealing a little bit about the personality of their users. There is a wastebasket at each station.

1. In Hugh’s dressing room space there is a program with “Austin” crossed out and “Hugh” written in to the starring role.
2. In Holly's area there is a letter from Holly to an agency that helps find birth parents. It lists her age—25.
3. In Austin’s space, you find a printout of increasingly desperate love e-mails from Anita to Austin. Attached is a post-it that reads “enough for restraining order?”
The Stacks

You don’t need to do anything to change the appearance of your stacks.

1. Stuck inside an audiobook of Shakespeare there is a magazine page with letters cut out.
2. A photograph of an infant girl is found in _Tess of the D’Urbervilles_. It is dated twenty-five years ago.
3. _The Remains of the Day_ and _Good in Bed_ are on the shelf, but contain no clues.
4. You don’t find _Divorce & Money_, because it’s in Bea’s purse at the crime scene.
5. _Gone with the Wind_ is missing from the shelf.

Hear from the Suspects

Let the participants explore freely, until most people seem to have found the majority of the clues. This may take between thirty minutes and one hour, depending on how many people are playing and how elaborate the scenes are.

When players are done searching, announce that the police have the suspects’ statements ready. Call everyone back together in a room or space with a projector. These statements will be short videos recorded in advance, with suspects played by staff members or volunteers.

Before playing the videos, say:

“Good work discovering the clues! But before you decide who is guilty, let’s hear what the suspects have to say. Maybe they can explain the incriminating evidence you uncovered.”

JUSTIN: I can’t believe you even suspect me—I’ve been keeping this company running smoothly for years! You’re right, I am in love with Holly. And I was furious when I found that letter about Austin’s secret meetings with her. He’s just going to break her heart, like he does to every woman! I can’t stand to see her hurt, and I would do anything to protect her. I was so furious that I ripped up the letter and threw it in the trash in the dressing room. But I’m not the blackmailer, I swear! If I were going to use the letter as blackmail, why would I rip it up the first place? And the killer has to be the blackmailer, right?

Does anybody suspect Anita? Anita, what do you have to say for yourself?
ANITA: I would never have hurt Austin! I loved him! We were high school sweethearts twenty-five years ago, you know. I was his true love. I mean, sure, he left me very suddenly back then, for some Little Miss Perfect. But when I heard about his divorce with Bea, I knew it was our chance to be together again! We have so much in common. Actually, one very important thing . . . but I don’t want to talk about that. Anyway, he might have seemed a little hesitant in those e-mails, but I know he would have come around. Once I told him about . . . well, never mind. But he would have realized that I’m the only one for him, I’m sure of it. Holly must have done it! She knew she was going to lose Austin to me, and she couldn’t stand that.

HUGH: Justin accidentally threw the pieces of that letter into my trash can. I taped it back together so I could read it. So what? And then I realized it was my chance at the big shot. Maybe I could blackmail Austin into not auditioning for the lead role in our next show. And then it would finally be mine! Plus, it was a nice chance to get back at Austin for breaking my sister’s heart. Can’t he see what he’s doing to her? When he left her in high school, she had to go away. She was gone for nine entire months. She won’t talk about it, but obviously she had some kind of nervous breakdown from it all.

So yeah, I took advantage of an opportunity. But I’m not the killer. If this company folds, I’ll never get to be a star! Plus, I wouldn’t want to hurt Anita even more. And she didn’t kill him, either. Justin must have done it. He was jealous and he had access to the knife.

BEA: Yes, OK, obviously I realized my husband was having an affair with Holly. I’m sure it’s not the first one either, the womanizer. But I didn’t need to kill him! We were getting a divorce. I was going to have him out of my life anyway. I didn’t have any reason to blackmail him either. I already had evidence he was cheating, and that was going to get me an excellent divorce settlement. And you know, I didn’t even want him to die. We had a lot of good years together, and I suppose in some ways I still loved him. And I never went backstage, so I didn’t have access to that prop knife. I bet that crazy Anita did him in.

HOLLY: I know what you all think, and that it looks bad, but I wasn’t having an affair with Austin! I swear! I . . . I did write that letter. I just can’t explain it right now. I won’t. That’s my personal, private business. I’ll just say that I cared about Austin very deeply and I would never have
wanted any harm to come to him. And I can’t imagine blackmailing or hurting anyone. I suppose it must have been Bea because she’s jealous about what she thinks we did. I feel so responsible for that!

Guess Whodunnit?

Give everyone five to ten minutes to discuss the clues and the statements. People can work alone, in couples, or in teams. Refreshments may be served at this point. Have answer slips ready so people can write down the name of the suspect they accuse, as well as their own name or team name. Collect the slips.

Hear the Confessions

Once all the answer slips have been collected, bring people’s attention back for a second set of videos—this time, with each character admitting their secrets.

HOLLY: I guess there’s no point in hiding it any more. Austin Jane is my father! He and my mother separated before I was born; he never knew about me. She put me up for adoption. She must have been very young. An agency was able to track down Austin for me. I’m glad we got at least a small chance to get to know each other. I wasn’t having an affair with Austin and I’m not the killer.

ANITA: I have a secret as well. Twenty-five years ago, when we were high school sweethearts, Austin Jane got me pregnant. He left me before I could tell him. I gave the baby up for adoption, but my whole adult life I have wondered what happened to my daughter! That’s why I knew that Austin and I would be together again—when I told him we had a child. I didn’t know where she was, but I thought we could find her together. I’m no killer. And Holly! You’re my daughter!

BEA: I’m happy you found each other, Anita and Holly. I truly am. And Holly, I’m so sorry I misunderstood what your meetings meant. I wish Austin would have told me. But our marriage was over anyway. I may have been wrong and jealous, but I’m not the killer.
JUSTIN: Holly . . . if you weren’t having an affair with Austin . . . I was wondering if you’d like to go out sometime. I mean, maybe this isn’t a good time to ask, right after a murder and all. But I thought I’d missed my chance once and I don’t want to do it again! And you don’t have to worry—I’m not the killer.

HUGH: Ugh. Everybody is just so disgustedly happy! Of course I knew about Holly all along. Do you think I’m an idiot? My sister went missing for nine months after a tryst with Austin years ago. Twenty-five years later, some perky ditz of exactly the right age shows up out of nowhere and starts having secret meetings with Austin? Hah. I put two and two together when I found that note about a secret meeting from Holly. She must be Anita’s daughter! Well, I couldn’t let the truth come out. It would kill her to find out who her daughter was that way! And she’d just get right back together with Austin, and then he could break her heart all over again! No way. And could I really let that jerk take my sister AND my starring role? Why does everything work out for him? I was more jealous than you realized, and I thought I was protecting my sister. I’m the killer!

Wrap-Up

People who got the correct answer will appreciate a chance to be recognized. During the final set of videos, a staff person can sort through the answer slips to find those that are correct. Put them in a bowl. After the killer is revealed, you can use the slips in this bowl to raffle off a few small prizes.