Non-defining relative clauses

You will remember that defining relative clauses provide you with essential information that you need to understand the meaning of the sentence. In this handout, you will study how to use non-defining relative clauses.

A non-defining relative clause provides us with additional information to the main part of a sentence. It is not essential for understanding the gist of a sentence, but helps provide richer detail for our deeper understanding. For example, if we say 'My uncle Wilbur, who lives in Sydney, is an expert on ancient Chinese medicine', the part of the sentence which is underlined is the relative clause. If we do not include this clause we still know who Wilbur is and what he is an expert in. The relative clause just provides extra information. A non-defining relative clause is placed between commas, as you can see from the example.

Remember that a relative clause contains a relative pronoun: who, which, whose or whom. The relative clause can refer to the subject of the sentence, to the object of a sentence or to a possessive. Examples are provided below.

Subject My uncle Wilbur, who lives in Sydney, is an expert on Chinese medicine.
Object Wilbur presented a lecture, which was attended by the Chinese Ambassador, on Chinese medicine.
Possessive My uncle Wilbur, whose knowledge of Chinese medicine is well-known, will be visiting me next week.

Activity 1: Read the paragraph. Read the short newspaper article below and answer the comprehension questions. Then underline all the relative clauses that you can find.

Yesterday Fong Lee, who is only 16 years old, broke the world record for the 100 metre sprint. The event, which took place in Athens, was attended by over a thousand spectators. Fong Lee, whose father acts as her manager, was reportedly 'extremely excited' by her feat, and is hoping to represent her country in the next Olympic Games.

1. How old is Fong Lee?
2. Where did she race yesterday?
3. How many people watched her?
4. Who is her manager?
5. How did Fong Lee feel after her sprint?

Activity 2: Fill in the gaps. Have a look at the newspaper article below and fill in the gaps with the correct relative pronoun.

It has been reported that Simon Lee, ----- daughter broke the record for the 100 metre sprint a few weeks ago, has been arrested in Hong Kong. Mr. Lee, ----- acts as Manager for his daughter's athletic career, was allegedly involved in a brawl outside a nightclub, 'The Place'. The nightclub, ----- is known to attract celebrities from the world of sports, has been operating since 1995.