

The Missing Master Key

PLAYER EVIDENCE / KEEP PAGES 3–4 SEPARATE

The last visitors have gone. The archivist reaches for the museum’s master key. Its hook is empty. A note on the desk says it was filed safely. Work out where, so the museum can close for the night.

Print pages 1–2 to play. Pages 3–4 contain optional help and the ending. Paper and a pen are enough. There is no real timer. This is a separate story, with no answers from the paid cases.

01 / THE ARCHIVIST’S SHELF NOTE

“The five books go back in one line. Each book’s tag carries one letter. Read the letters from left to right once the shelf is correct.”

Book	Letter on its tag
Moonlog	C
Atlas	C
Tidebook	K
Herbarium	O
Aviary	L

Atlas is first.

Aviary is immediately before Herbarium.

Moonlog is immediately before Tidebook.

Herbarium is somewhere before Moonlog.

Use all five books once. “Immediately before” means next to it, with no book between.

Your shelf word: _____

Optional web version: afterhourscasefiles.co.uk

Scan the code to play online. The printed game can be completed entirely offline.



The label and the drawers

PLAYER EVIDENCE / FOLLOW THE THREE RECORDS

02 / LABEL INSIDE THE SHELF NOTE

“Count the letters in your shelf word. Move each coded letter **backwards** by that many alphabet places. One move takes B to A. Wrap from A to Z when needed.”

X Y F W

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Your decoded shape: _____

03 / PACKING SLIP FROM THE ARCHIVE DESK

MASTER KEY: 38 g

PAPER ENVELOPE: 4 g

PROTECTIVE POUCH: 12 g

The key is inside one envelope and one pouch. Nothing else is inside.

The storeroom records show four drawers. The key’s drawer must match **both** your decoded shape and the total packed weight.

Drawer	Label	Packed weight
A	Star	58 g
B	Moon	54 g
C	Star	54 g
D	Star	52 g

Our drawer: _____ Our total weight: _____

Before checking the ending, explain why each of the other drawers fails one or both checks.

A little help from the archive

OPTIONAL HELP / READ ONLY THE HINT YOU NEED

Keep the solution page covered. Try the first nudge for a clue, then stop if it is enough to continue. Cover lower hints with scrap paper.

The shelf

First nudge: Atlas is fixed at the left. Treat Aviary–Herbarium and Moonlog–Tidebook as two pairs.

Stronger nudge: The Aviary–Herbarium pair must come before the Moonlog–Tidebook pair.

The label

First nudge: Use the length of the word you found, rather than a number from the book titles.

Stronger nudge: The word has five letters. X back five gives S; Y back five gives T.

The drawers

First nudge: Include the key and both pieces of packaging. Check the shape as well as the weight.

Stronger nudge: The packed total is 54 g. A moon-labelled 54 g drawer still fails the shape check.

NEXT PAGE: FULL SOLUTION AND ENDING

The key is waiting in Drawer C

FULL SOLUTION / OPEN WHEN YOU HAVE MADE YOUR CASE

- 1. The shelf.** Atlas, Aviary, Herbarium, Moonlog, Tidebook is the only order that obeys every clue. The tag letters spell **CLOCK**.
- 2. The label.** CLOCK has five letters. Moving X Y F W backwards five places gives **S T A R**.
- 3. The packed weight.** $38 + 4 + 12 = 54$ g. Drawer C has both the star label and that weight. A and D have the wrong weight. B has the right weight but the wrong shape.

CASE CLOSED

The archivist pulls open Drawer C. The master key is tucked inside its envelope and pouch, exactly as the records promised. A second note reads: "New storage system. Sorry. Next time, I'll leave the key on its hook." The museum closes for the night.

YOUR NEXT INVESTIGATION

In **The Meridian Cabinet**, a bronze dial has disappeared from the same museum. A courier is collecting the waiting crates at midnight. Compare the clocks, challenge the alibis and identify the package before it leaves.

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