



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2004 Volume II: Children's Literature in the Classroom

Using Diverse Children's Detective Fiction to Build Comprehension Skills

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Introduction

Having taught reading to students on a number of different elementary grade levels, I recognize the importance of training them to recognize various bits of information that they can use to assist them in drawing conclusions, making predictions, solving problems, and, generally, in achieving a better understanding of the situations being presented in the text that they are reading. Besides preparing them for the rigors of standardized testing, these skills are applicable throughout life. Obviously, they also play a prominent role in achieving the goals presented in both their math and science curricula, where solving problems is a key element of learning. The primary activities in my unit will help to teach various lessons related to children's detective fiction. These activities will attempt to further the development of each student's ability to identify and utilize specific material to understand a particular situation.

My Particular Teaching Situation

At present I am teaching in an EOL (Essentials of Literacy) classroom. The twenty third-graders in this classroom rank lowest among the three existing third grades. In reading, students in third grade classes are grouped according to ability: high, medium, and low. Generally the high group is reading above grade level, the medium is on level, and the low group reads below level. Besides being academically below grade level, almost all students in EOL exhibit a variety of personal and behavioral problems. Although each child wishes to perform well, these problems often get in the way. There is considerable interpersonal conflict in class, resistance to academics, and acting out in various forms. Despite the obstacles, a wide range of progress is achieved.

During a different time of day and for a shorter time period, I am also teaching my Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute unit from 2003, in one of the regular third grade classrooms, to students who represent all three reading levels. Though the general ability level is somewhat higher than it is in EOL, there are similar academic and behavioral problems, though they are usually of a lesser magnitude. I plan to use elements of my unit in both of these settings, but the material and approach will be designed primarily for use in a regular third grade classroom with similar characteristics.

Though I plan to teach my unit in a third grade classroom, it is adaptable to a number of other grade levels. Having taught third and fourth grade for a number of years, I feel the material is especially suited for either of these grade levels. With appropriate adaptation it could be used on an even higher grade level, especially fifth or sixth grade. A middle school group of low achievers also could be a target of this unit's material.

The Students I Teach

Before I progress any further with my unit, I think it is important to include a brief general picture of the school and classroom in which I will be teaching this material. I will also include a very general personal appraisal of the circumstances surrounding my students' lives. These comments in no way should limit another teacher in a different circumstance in deciding to use my unit's suggestions. My remarks are included primarily to explain my motivation and goals.

I work in what is presently a kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school with sixteen classrooms containing a total population of about four hundred students. About ninety to ninety-five percent of these students are African American. In recent years, my classes have consistently reflected this percentage. Of the remaining members, most are Hispanic/Latino along with one or two white students. The ages of most third graders in our school vary from those who have just turned eight to a few who are close to eleven. This variation is primarily a result of retention. The students come from a variety of social-economic backgrounds and home situations. A number of them have a relative other than their mother or father as their primary care giver. Their academic ability and the level of their general knowledge vary considerably, but it is often below the norm for children of this age. Many are performing below their potential. Some are members of families with multiple problems. There are few who do not face difficulties in their lives. Most, though not all, parents or guardians are supportive of school. Most want to be and are helpful, but often are not sure of the best way to go about assisting. Often the struggles of everyday life interfere with their efforts.

At this point of their lives, most students still enjoy school, but many are beginning to face considerable difficulties both academically and behaviorally. They are starting to understand that their school career will have some bearing on their lives beyond the present, though their actions often are influenced negatively by peer pressure, their lack of basic skills and general knowledge, difficulty in establishing long-term goals, and the lack of positive self-image, especially regarding their academic abilities. Nevertheless, at least on the surface, they still have high aspirations regarding their future.

Focus on Diversity

Keeping the racial and ethnic composition of my school in mind, I have decided to develop my goal of improving reading comprehension, through understanding the relationship of various related facts, within a framework that includes characters representing a diversity of individuals. Generally, in the past, characters in popular children's detective fiction have been white, both male and female. Even in recent years, students recognize Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, and even the more modern Encyclopedia Brown as the detectives who ruled over detective stories aimed at the young reader. Though I certainly recognized these mystery works as worthy tools to use in developing students' reading skills and as stories to be enjoyed by children of all backgrounds, I feel there is a value to exposing them to a wider range of junior sleuths. Seeing children of

different origins solving the crime, being the hero, and just plain having the sense to take the facts and figure things out has to be a positive for all students, especially for those who do not regularly see themselves in such roles.

In most of the stories that will be the focus of my unit, a diverse group of young people cooperates to solve the dilemma that they have encountered. Though there is sometimes a clear leader, each member of the group has a positive attribute to contribute to the investigation. This conveys another positive social lesson that should serve students well. In some cases, such as with the Kooties Club gang, the junior detectives have taken the social ostracism they have received from other kids and turned it into a positive. This group of seeming “losers” has banded together, giving each other the support needed to develop their self-esteem and freeing themselves to utilize their individual skills. If friends give you positive support, you feel better about yourself and usually can get a whole lot more done, as students might express the idea.

Meeting New Haven’s Academic Standards

As mentioned in my introduction, my primary goal is to develop student comprehension through the examination and utilization of facts. This goal is well aligned with the goals of the New Haven School System. In addition, there are other more specific areas of the curriculum that this unit targets.

Throughout my unit, students will be reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The New Haven School District’s emphasis on literacy is a focus in all aspects of this unit. Material has been integrated with social development, language arts, and social studies. In everything that is presented, vocabulary development will be stressed through the discussion of words unfamiliar to most students. A specific vocabulary lesson will be found in my section on lesson plans. Emphasis will also be placed on understanding and identifying how authors develop suspense, motivating the reader to move forward. Developing such techniques is part of the third grade empowering writers program and will be explored within this unit.

A more specific list of the major New Haven academic standards covered in this unit may be found toward the end of this paper.

Getting Started

Since I will not be teaching full time, the classroom I will be working in will not be my own. Maryellen Hellyar with whom I once co-taught, has agreed to work with me in her third. After having taught my 2003 unit in her classroom this year, I am certain that the arrangement will be a positive one. It is important to note also that the unit is not written differently from what I would have written were I to teach it in my own classroom.

Riddles

Most students enjoy trying to solve riddles. Though many are just plain silly, they require students to examine the riddle’s content carefully to find possible clues that will lead to its solution. Especially the riddle’s

vocabulary must be investigated, with the “detectives” trying to find multiple meanings that might keep the reader on the right track. In their examination of riddles, students will be asked to look at the facts presented in the riddle. It is important that they then try to look beyond the obvious interpretation of the facts. Could the meaning of certain words be other than what we normally might expect? In the riddle that asks, “Where do snowmen go to dance?” the teacher would ask, “What is another word for ‘dance’?” Hopefully students would see that the answer to the riddle is “snowball.” In the riddle “What’s harder to catch the faster you run?” students’ need to discuss what happens to you as you run faster. “You breathe harder.” “What do you try to do as you breathe harder?” “Catch your breath.”

These simple exercises do not consume much time, but they do begin to encourage the students to examine details and think more in a mode that will help them to unravel a mystery.

The use of a daily riddle will begin immediately. There is a chart containing one hundred riddles, “Laughing Our Way to the 100th Day.” In New Haven, students are made aware of the march toward the 100th day when various activities related to the number one hundred are conducted. Using the chart fits naturally into the curriculum, as well as into this unit.

There are also a number of very good sources for children’s riddles available on the Internet. They may be found simply by searching for “riddles.” My favorite is www.justriddlesandmore.com. Besides riddles, the sites contain picture puzzles, hidden faces, challenge puzzles, jumbles, and a mystery corner. There is also much more.

Developing a Framework

Beginning sometime in January, I will review what we have done as we solved our daily riddles. (Looked at the facts. Looked for less obvious interpretations of the facts. Looked for the interrelationship of facts. Looked for any facts that seemed unrelated to a solution. Finally, drew our final conclusion, our solution.) I will then lead students into comparing a mystery to a riddle, a mini-mystery we may be able to unravel by examining the known facts. They should be able to see the mystery connections among things with which they are generally familiar, such as riddles, math problems and tricks, picture puzzles, and even the solving of every day mysteries. (“Where did I leave my glasses?” “Why didn’t Juan speak to me today?”) They should be able to see that a mystery revolves around a puzzle or an unusual problem that needs to be solved.

Students will then participate in a general discussion of mysteries that they have seen on television, at the movies, read about in books, heard about on television news programs, or perhaps read about in the newspaper. The class will develop a list of the basic elements that are part of a mystery. The list should look something like this:

Characters

(Often including a detective or detectives)

Setting

A Problem

Main Events

A Solution

(Resolution)

They will notice that this list is identical to some of the elements in story maps that they have made in reading. This list will be used later as they organize the events in the mystery stories we will cover.

The role of the “detective” or “detectives” and the clues they discover will be the next topic of discussion. Students should be quite familiar with police and detective programs that they may use as a source of information to draw upon when determining the process used in solving a mystery. They should have many examples of how clues are discovered and interrelated in order to solve the dilemma. The presence of clues that are “red herrings” leading us astray will be examined. Pupils will note that police and detectives often carry a small notepad that they use to record the facts that they uncover during the investigation. These notes are then used in drawing conclusions as they attempt to solve the mystery. Each pupil will be given a similar notepad in which to record clues that are discovered in the mysteries stories we listen to or read.

Mini-mysteries

We will now turn to the examination of short mysteries that will come from three different sources. Students will not use their notepads in these investigations. Rather, we will work together, recording the clues on the board or story paper as the entire group examines the mystery in search of facts.

Stories to Solve: Folktales from Around the World

This book presents fourteen very short mysteries from folk tales from different parts of the world. Each is one or two pages in length and is followed by the solution. The book contains small sketches and often diagrams that increase interest and make the solution easier to understand if students have difficulty determining the solution or just “don’t get it.” Third graders should be able to at least come close to solving them.

Still More Stories to Solve: Fourteen Folktales from Around the World

This book is similar to the previous source, but the mysteries are slightly longer and more difficult. Some are suitable for third grades, if the teacher selects them according to the ability of the class being taught. Most of them should be appropriate for higher grades.

Two Minute Mysteries

In this book, there are seventy-nine short mysteries. There is a detective, Dr. Haledjian, who appears in each story. Though the mysteries are only about a page and a half long, the clues are much more tricky and, thus, are more difficult to solve. The situations are also more adult, though not to the point where none would be of value for use with a third grade. They could provide motivation if they are presented as a challenge to students who have developed skill at solving the easier mysteries. The teacher of younger student needs to select the stories that are appropriate for the class being taught.

For teachers of older children, there are sources with longer and more difficult mysteries, (Five Minute and Ten

Minute Mysteries) that one might wish to consult.

Material on the Internet

Two internet sites that I have referred to while discussing riddles (www.justriddlesandmore.com and www.kidsriddles.html) contain additional information that the teacher might wish to draw upon. "Mystery Corner" is a sub-topic of the kids' riddle section. It contains a number of mini-mysteries similar to those listed above.

Examining an Entire Book

I have chosen to present three books of children's detective fiction to my students. Each is part of a series that I hope students will choose to explore independently at a later time. All three books contain characters that represent the diversity that is one of my primary goals. I will present comments on all three books, but I will present the first in considerably more detail, relative to the approach I will take in the presentation of all three of them. It is important that the children have not read the book before, so that their predictions are based upon the clues they will gather. If one or more students have read the story, the teacher should consider switching to another book in the series.

The Blanket Burglar

The Blanket Burglar is part of a series known as "The Screech Owl Mysteries." Sandra G. Garrett and Philip C. Williams wrote all of the books in this series. Although the book is written on a level that most third graders can handle, I will read the mystery to the class. This will allow the group to conduct the investigation together. It will also allow any student with reading difficulties to be included. Working together they will be setting up a pattern for the examination of other mysteries.

The six school children that populate the books in this series represent what is almost the ultimate in diversity. There is even a dog, but sadly not a cat. The three boys and three girls, who appear to be about ten or eleven years old, have banded together to form a club whose objective is to solve mysteries. After some debate they decide to call themselves the Screech Owls because owls are curious like detectives. These owls are also usually brown and gray, mixed with white and black. These are colors that they feel are "Like us!" A bit convenient, but it gets the point across. Their members include:

Luis , a Latino

Tommy , a Makah Indian

Derek , an African American

Rebecca , a white

Mai-Li , an Asian

Jennie , a deaf mute

And

Wolf , a faithful dog

Not only are they the almost perfect picture of diversity, they each make at least one significant contribution to the solving of the mystery. Even Wolf does his share

Though this situation might be difficult to duplicate in reality, it gives the students an ideal and shows it working. There is something in the story for almost anyone to identify with, whether it is one's race or ethnicity or the ability to make a positive contribution to the group.

Presentation of The Blanket Burglar

I will read the mystery to the class. Though the book does not have chapters, it is clearly broken into sections by a row of six asterisks. As I read, they will now use their notepads to jot down what they believe to be clues presented in each section. When each section is completed, we will discuss the clues as a group. These clues will be written on a piece of chart paper that will eventually include all of the clues. They will then jot down any conclusions they may have been drawn. We also will record any predictions that they might have made at this point. "Where do you think the story is going?" "Are there any clues that you believe are red herrings?" Their predictions will also be noted on a piece of chart paper.

During the next reading, the same procedure will be followed. In some cases, we may cover more than one section in a period. However, the examination of the facts that seem to be clues, the conclusions we have drawn and predictions that we have made will consume the majority of the session. It should take about a week to cover the entire story. At the start of each reading, we will review the charts we are compiling. When the mystery is revealed, we will review all of our clues, conclusions, and predictions in order to evaluate the course of our investigation.

Summary of The Blanket Burglar

In this mystery, Screech Owls attempt to discover who has stolen Mrs. Lolanski's blanket from her clothesline. The six young characters band together, form their detective club, and proceed to solve the mystery. Each makes a particular contribution to the solution. They are constantly reviewing their clues, drawing conclusions, and making predictions, some of which prove to be incorrect. In the end, they discover that the culprit is a runaway horse who got tangled in the blanket. A grateful Mrs. Kolanski bakes them cookies shaped like ponies and all's right with the world.

Clues Students Might Find in The Blanket Burglar

Since I am covering this story in more detail, I have included a list of clues that students might select:

- Mrs. Kolanski's missing blanket, a gift from her sister in Kentucky
- Strange horse tracks in the yard
- An unusual chip in one hoof print
- Specks of mud
- Various pieces of blanket on a fence
- A small broken branch from a Sitka spruce tree that they find in an area where such trees were not present.
- A small grove of Sitka spruce trees that is located in another area

- A strange beast they see during their investigation. The beast appears to be a centaur.
- A picture taken by Mei-Li as they run in fear from the centaur. (The creature has the body of a horse and what seems to be the head of Abraham Lincoln.)

As I have stated, a frightened runaway horse is the guilty party. He had become caught in Mrs. Kolanski's blanket that had a picture of Abraham Lincoln on it. You will remember that the blanket came from Kentucky, which happens to be the birthplace of President Lincoln.

The story ends with a short glossary of vocabulary words that may be unfamiliar to students, followed by a moral that trumpets the value of diversity in "knowledge and background" as a means of accomplishing one's goals. These concluding elements are a part of all books in this series.

Completing a Story Map and Writing a Summary

Students will now review the elements of the story map for a mystery that they developed previously. As they often do in regular reading class, they now will fill in the various sections, this time using information from *The Blanket Burglar*. This will then supply them with the material needed to write a detailed summary of the mystery. These will then be shared with other members of the class.

The Mystery of Apartment A-13

Our investigation of children's detectives will continue with *The Mystery of Apartment A-13*. The same steps used with *The Blanket Burglar* will be followed in presenting this story. This book is part of a series called "The Kooties Club Mysteries" written by M. J. Closson. The characters in this book also contain most of the elements of diversity that I am looking for in my mysteries, although all of their members are boys. I am including a brief summary so that the teacher may more easily determine if this mystery is one she or he wishes to use. It has definite variations from *The Blanket Burglar*.

Characters

The Kooties, as this group of young detectives call themselves, include five boys, Abe, Ben, Gabe, Toby, and Ty. The setting appears to be an inner city neighborhood in and around a large housing complex that many would refer to as a "project." The race and ethnicity of the boys is never really defined, though the reader may draw some conclusions from their names coupled with the illustrations. These are black and white sketches of boys with physical characteristics that lead the reader to believe that in the most general terms their members are African American, Latino, and white. One is fat, one is skinny, one wears glasses, and all look rather awkward. Having been rejected by some of their classmates, they "hang" together and look for

mysteries to solve. The name of their club, The Kooties Club, comes from the fact that others claim they are distasteful because they have cooties, a common technique used by some children wishing to ostracize others. The boys turn it into a positive, saying that if no one else wants to bother with you, you're included in their circle. They seem relatively happy and secure within their group.

Summary of The Mystery of Apartment A-13

Ty, one of the "koots," becomes curious when he realizes that he has never seen the person who lives in apartment A-13 in the building across from his. Since he knows everyone living in the building, this seems particularly strange to him. He shares his observation with the rest of the "koots" and the mystery is born.

After elaborate observation, planning, and some outright snooping, they decide that something menacing is happening in A-13. Each night a strange person parks in the building lot, takes a bundle to A-13, and returns with another bundle that is placed in the car's trunk where there are other similar bundles. Once this visitor returned with a basket of clothing that was also placed in the trunk. They suspect that the clothes were covering a body or something equally sinister. Throughout their investigation they never see a light coming from A-13. They also are unable to explain the screams, laughter, and arguing that they heard coming from the apartment as they made one of their investigative attempts. Circumstances lead to the revelation that a blind man lives in A-13. He receives daily Meals on Wheels, returns the dishes and utensils the next day, and occasionally is brought a book recorded on tape. He has no use for lights, so he never turns one on. Naturally, the "koots" and he become friends, leaving us with the feeling that they will visit often.

In the end, the mystery is solved for the reader and for the "koots," but they do not really arrive at the solution through their investigative skills, though they certainly discover a number of clues. Hopefully, students will be more successful in drawing conclusions and making predictions as they gather the facts from the story.

As a final activity, students will complete a story map for the story and write a summary as they did for the first book. Their opinions regarding both books will be compared.

Lost in the Tunnel of Time

The last mystery book which we will read as a group, *Lost in the Tunnel of Time*, is a part of the "Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs" series by Sharon M. Draper. This story is considerably longer than the other two that the class will have read, and there is considerably more substance to the content of its pages. Though a search for an underground escape passage used by African American slaves as they fled northward is the primary focus of this mystery, this book's primary attribute is the dramatic personal picture it paints in showing the plight of these escapees. It is geared to a slightly older audience, probably around fifth or sixth grade, but, if the story is read orally with appropriate discussion, it offers considerable expansion of historical information that third and fourth grade students have likely encountered in more academic presentations. Though there is no crime, real or suspected, to solve, at various points characters use clues to solve the dilemmas they face.

Characters

Ziggy, Rico, Rashawn, and Jerome, four young African American youths, are going on a class outing along the Ohio River on a tour boat near their home in Cincinnati. Ziggy's accent reveals his West Indian background. They are fun loving preteens who have formed a club that meets rather irregularly to solve mysteries. They care about school but are not the most conscientious of students. They also have a faithful dog, Afrika, who

belongs to Rashawn. In print and illustration, they are presented as boys with whom my students could easily relate.

Summary of Lost in the Tunnel of Time

During their outing on the Ohio River, the “dinosaurs” and their classmates hear much of the fact and folklore surrounding the area’s connection to the Underground Railroad from their teacher and Mr. Greene, an older Black man who is rich with historical information about slavery and, particularly, the Underground Railroad.

After the excursion has ended, Ziggy reveals that in order to help him write his report on the Underground railroad, Mr. Greene has given him a very old map showing underground passageways that were dug to facilitate escape to the Ohio River and eventually on to freedom. These tunnels are located beneath what is now the site of their own school.

Naturally the Black Dinosaurs decide to find the tunnels. They manage to achieve their goal, but disaster strikes, shortly after they have found the remains of a bundle left behind by an escaping slave. The tunnel caves in and they are seemingly doomed, since they have been careful to conceal their whereabouts. They experience the desperation and fear that was probably similar to the feelings felt by slaves as they maneuvered these same tunnels. Luckily, with the combined efforts of a classmate, Mr. Greene, their teacher, parents and relatives, an entire rescue crew, and that faithful dog, Afrika, they are rescued, safe and definitely wiser. Naturally, Ziggy writes an inspired report that is included at the end of the story, along with some factual information on the Underground Railroad.

Since the mysteries in this story abandon the pattern of detective fiction found in the first two books, students will abandon their role as detective. Rather, they will discuss facts and events thoroughly as the story is read. Finally, they will fill out the same story map and the resulting summary. They will then discuss this story in relationship to the other two that they have read.

Independent Reading

To conclude this unit, students will be asked to select a different mystery and follow the procedure used with the first two books on their own. They may select from the three series that have been presented or explore another story that might interest them. No restrictions will be made on their choice. They will, finally, be asked to give a brief summary to the class telling us about their selection.

Lesson Plans

Though I have included many general teaching procedures throughout my narrative, I will now suggest three specific lesson plans for activities related to my unit.

Lesson One: Using Detective Fiction to Develop Degrees of Reading Power

Subject Matter Area: Reading

Vocabulary: Will vary with each lesson developed.

Objectives: 1. Students will develop skill at using various context clues to identify unknown words and as a result will develop greater reading power.

2. Students will be able to identify the context clue used to aid in the selection of the appropriate word.

Procedure:

The goal of developing independent readers is a primary objective of the elementary school. One means of achieving this goal is through an approach that teaches students to look for various clues within the context of the material being read as a means of recognizing and understanding unfamiliar words. Besides teaching these techniques for unlocking unfamiliar words, this approach trains students to read more carefully, resulting in an overall improvement in comprehension. All New Haven elementary school teachers are familiar with this program designed to increase pupils' "degrees of reading power." (DRP)

There is a variety of materials available for use while working with students in such a program. Basically, these materials provide paragraphs where key words have been omitted. Students are asked to find the appropriate word from among four choices, all of them could fit within the sentence's structure, but only one makes sense within the context of the larger piece. Students learn to explore the context before and after the missing word in order to find clues that will help to identify the missing word. The important skills developed here are to understand the procedures needed to explore the context for clues and the ability to recognize and utilize these clues when they are found.

In this lesson plan, I provide an example using a book from this unit to create an original worksheet that will be used to develop the skills discussed above. This sheet and others that I will develop will have the advantage of serving as reading instruction material as well as providing a source of review of the story's content and narrative components. Its primary function, however, will be to improve the student's reading ability. Initially we will focus on the context that leads one to the appropriate missing word. Students will be asked to justify their choice. The completed worksheets will be saved for future reference related to the unit's contents.

Below is an example of such a passage based upon one of the stories used in my unit.

The Mystery of the Blanket Bandit

Student's Name: Date:

The members of the Kooties Club lived in a _____ (a. village b. neighborhood c. countryside d. town) with many tall apartment houses and few parks and little grass. They had chosen their club name because some of the other kids had _____ (a. accepted b. befriended c. rejected d. welcomed) them by saying that they shouldn't be touched because they had cooties.

Ty knew everyone in the apartments. Even if he didn't know their name, he could _____ (a. wash b. draw c. recognize d. see) their face. He knew their car, their family, and the apartment in which each family lived.

He was a very _____

(a. observant b. attractive c. ugly d. athletic) individual.

The boys became interested in apartment A-13 when Ty realized that he didn't know who lived there and that the apartment was always _____ (a. empty b. dark c. noisy d. open) at night. No light ever appeared in the windows.

The Kooties began their _____ (a. celebration b. visit c. trip d. investigation) by looking, listening and searching for clues. They were certain that daily visits to the apartment by mysterious _____ (a. animals b. children c. strangers d. detectives), people whom they had never seen before, held the key to solving the mystery of apartment A-13.

Finally, the boys discovered that the apartment was occupied by a man named Mr. Dodge. Mr Dodge was _____ (a. blind b. old c. lost d. energetic), so there was no need for him to turn on the lights at night. The mysterious strangers were bringing him supper each day and removing his _____ (a. cat b. television c. furniture d. trash) so that his apartment would be clean.

The Kooties had solved their mystery and had found themselves a new _____

(a. relative b. criminal c. friend d. suspect), one who certainly didn't think that they had cooties.

Lesson Two: Increasing Your Detective Vocabulary

Subject Matter Area: Reading

Objectives: 1. Students will develop a specialized vocabulary related to detective fiction.

2. Students will develop ability to define vocabulary using context clues.

3. Students will use dictionary to check definitions.

4. Students will create crossword and word search puzzles based upon this vocabulary.

Procedure:

As students progress through the activities in this unit, we will compile a list of vocabulary words associated with the detective stories and the solving of crimes, puzzles, and problems. These words will be listed on a large chart that will be displayed in the classroom. Each student will also keep an individual list. Initially the definition for each word will come from the context of the story, puzzle, or problem. This definition will then be compared with a dictionary's definition. Any variations will be discussed, with an agree upon definition being included on the chart.

Besides helping to increase students' understanding of the detective fiction that they read, these words will be used to construct crossword and word search puzzles. Though the teacher will create some of the first puzzles, most will come from the students themselves.

The following is a list of some appropriate words that a class might include:

alibi charges

clues deduction

defense detective

discover evidence

eyewitness guilty

hunch innocent

interrogation investigate

judge motive

red herring sleuth

suspects victim

Lesson Three: Launching Your Own Investigation

Subject Matter: Reading, research, creative writing, art

Vocabulary: centaur, mythology and associated words

Procedure:

In the story, *The Blanket Burglar*, the Screech Owls are confused by a hastily snapped photograph of a horse covered with a large blanket, adorned with a picture of Abraham Lincoln. They believe it is a centaur, a man with a horse's body. Though they know that the centaur is a part of Greek Mythology, little more is revealed about the creature. It will be the students' task to discover additional information regarding the details surrounding the background of this mythological character.

This may be done individually or in small groups. There is not a great deal of information available for children on the internet or in school libraries, but students should be able to uncover the following basic facts. You might want to warn them that most centaurs were not very reputable.

Centaurs had the body of a stallion with a man, from the navel up, including a human head and arms, where you would normally find the horse's head. Sometimes they had horns, wings, or both. They symbolized the unruly forces of nature. They fed on meat and often took part in drunken celebrations. Many were wild and savage, except for Chiron who was full of goodness and wisdom. Being the son of Ixion, he was the only immortal centaur. He was tutor of Greek heroes such as Achilles and Hercules. Accidentally wounded by Hercules, he lived in pain until he gave up his immortality to the Titan Prometheus. Another tale tells of his appealing to Zeus who transformed him into the constellation Sagittarius.

After children have uncovered this basic information, it will be shared and discussed by the class. We will then move to discover the fanciful Dr. Seuss tale of *Horton Hatches the Egg*, about an elephant who assumes the responsibility of sitting on the egg of an irresponsible mother bird who preferred to fly off and enjoy herself. Despite enduring many trials and tribulations, Horton is true to his word, staying until the egg is finally hatched. "I said what I meant and I meant what I said. An elephant's faithful one hundred percent." Horton's persistence is rewarded when the baby chick is born with the body of an elephant and the wings and feet of a

bird.

After a discussion regarding who is the rightful parent of the elephant-bird, students will create (draw) their own hybrid animal. They will write a brief summary of their animal's ancestry and tell us a bit about its existence as a hybrid. Taking clues from the picture, the class will make guesses about each animal's lineage, before the author reads the related story. Not much of a mystery, but it should be fun.

Standards Appendix

Reading

Content Standard 1.0. Student will develop developmentally appropriate strategies and reading behaviors to construct meaning, retell, and read fluently.

Performance Standard 1.1 Student will read for information and enjoyment as they become skilled readers. ©): Students will select materials that reflect our multi cultural heritage. Also Performance Standards 1.3, 1.5, and 1.6.

Writing

Content Standard 2.0. Students will progress along a continuum as they become skilled writers.

Performance Standards: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4.

Bibliography

The Kooties Club Mysteries

Cosson, M. J., *The Mystery of Apartment, A-13*. Logan, Iowa, Perfection Learning Corporation, 1998.

This book is one of the mysteries highlighted in this unit.

Other Kooties Club Mysteries:

Below is a list of Kooties Club Mysteries. They are similar in characters and general story structure to the book summarized in considerable detail within the narrative section of this unit. Students might choose from among them a book for their independent reading.

The Mystery of the Gross Gift

The Mystery of the Last Laugh

The Mystery of the Too Crisp Cash

The Mystery of Ben Franklin's Ghost

The Mystery of the Icky Icon

The Mystery of the Big Paw Print

The Mystery of Pb and J Jam

The Mystery of the Missing Heart

The Mystery of I Love Elvis

The Mystery of the Old Knife

The Mystery of Mr. Dodge

The Mystery of the Flying Mumm

The Screech Owls Mysteries

Garrett, Sandra G. et al, The Blanket Burglar. Vero Beach, Florida, Rourke Publications, Inc., 1994.

This mystery is one of the books highlighted in this unit.

Other Screech Owls Mysteries:

Below is a list of other Screech Owls Mysteries. They are similar in characters and general structure to the mystery summarized in considerable detail within the narrative section of this unit. Students might select a book from among them for their independent reading.

The Mystery of the Smuggler's Secret

The Mystery of the Candy Bandit

The Mystery of the Rainbow Monster

The Mystery of the Pirate's Treasure

The Mystery of the Haunted Barn

The Black Dinosaurs Mysteries

Draper, Sandra, Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs: Lost in the Tunnel of Time. New Jersey, Just Us Books, Inc. 1996.

Other Black Dinosaurs Mysteries:

Below is a list of two other mysteries involving the Black Dinosaurs. They are similar in characters and general

structure to the mystery summarized in detail within the narrative section of this unit. Students might select a book from among them for their independent reading.

Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs

Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs: Shadows of Caesar Creek

Shannon, George, *Stories to Solve*. New York, Harper Trophy, 1985.

Presents fourteen folktales from around the world. Each contains a puzzle to be solved by the reader. Few are longer than two short pages.

Shannon, George, *Still More Stories to Solve*. New York, Beech Tree Paperback, 1994.

Presents fourteen more folktales containing a puzzle to be solved.

Sobol, Donald, J., *Two-Minute Mysteries*. New York, Apple Paperbacks, 1997.

Presents seventy-nine short mysteries. Some are too difficult for many third graders. Teacher should select according to students' ability.

Poster

"Laughing Your Way to the 100th Day Poster: Helping Teachers Make a Difference." Really Good Stuff, 1-800-366-1920.
www.reallygoodstuff.com

This poster presents a riddle a day for 100 days. Great initial source for presenting easy "mysteries."

Internet

www.justriddlesandmore.com

www.kidsriddles.html

These two addresses present both riddles and mini-mysteries.

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