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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1982 Volume I: Society and the Detective Novel

Semi-Private Eyes

Guide for Curriculum Unit 82.01.05
by Anthony F. Franco

“Semi-Private Eyes” is designed to help students discover and appreciate detective fiction. The unit highlights the detective foil relationships made famous by three authors; Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson; Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot and Captain Arthur Hastings; and Rex Stout’s Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin. A special emphasis is placed upon the three foils—Watson, Hastings, and Goodwin—in an effort to show students that we all have our foils and become foils very frequently in our lives. The unit offers a variety of lesson strategies rather than several sample activities. Most of the ideas deal primarily with the improvement of student writing skills. As one of the criteria for the selection of foils was that they all relate the tales of mystery and suspense from their point of view, students will receive instruction in journal writing. The artistic convention of employing dialogue in writing will be examined from literary and technical approaches. Since our three authors are masterful writers of description, students will experience descriptive writing exercises designed to help them describe both places and people more effectively. As a culmination to the unit, students will write their own detective stories. Observation and listening skill activities have also been included to sharpen students’ abilities in these areas as well as activities regarding crime, criminals, and law enforcement to enhance students’ awareness of the world around them.

(Recommended for 7th, 8th and 9th grades English)

Key Words

Foils Detective Fiction Literature Reading Instruction

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