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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1989 Volume IV: Detective Fiction: Its Use as Literature and History

Plot, Character and Setting: A Study of Mystery and Detective Fiction

Guide for Curriculum Unit 89.04.09
by Patrick A. Velardi

This unit attempts to study mystery and detective fiction with middle-school children and then to improve writing skills using the fiction as a motivational force. The successful completion of the unit should provide young readers with a rich area for future reading, an increase of analytical reading skills as they read with deeper understanding of plot, setting, character in fiction, and, most importantly, means by which to inspire young people to write clearly, for a particular audience and for a specific purpose. The smaller sections of writing assignments will culminate into a larger project bringing all aspects of the unit together. Three possibilities exist for the final project. First, individual students can bring together their own writings on plot, character and create their own mystery or detective story. Second, the group can create a class mystery by pulling together various sections discussed in small groups. Third, each small group could create a mystery composed of parts discussed and written within their group. Whatever method chosen, final projects will be typed and duplicated to be shared by students in other classes. Elements of good writing will be strengthened, from the conception of the idea, through initial organization and writing, through proofreading, editing, and re-writing, and through peer support and guidance as the final product is produced.

(Recommended for English, Humanities, and Reading classes, grade 6)

Key Words

Mystery Thrillers Detective Fiction American Literature Reading Instruction Creative Writing Instruction

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