



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1995 Volume I: Gender, Race, and Milieu in Detective Fiction

It's A Mystery To Me

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most daunting tasks faced by educators is helping students to become better readers. This is accomplished by guiding them in developing strategies they can use to improve their own comprehension. Every lesson should begin by connecting the content of the selection with the students' background knowledge and experiences, linking the unknown to the known. Students should be encouraged to become familiar with new vocabulary, especially words which may be specific to the genre that they are reading. Further, it may be necessary for the teacher to provide specific instruction on how to understand the elements that make the style of writing unique. Once these foundations have been established, students can combine their new knowledge, their background information, and the story to make predictions about what might happen in the selection. With all of these elements working in conjunction, they can anticipate what is upcoming, read to discover if their prediction is accurate, and either refine, revise, or discard their incorrect predictions. Students should be encouraged not only to talk about how they arrived at their answers, but also to be able to provide supporting evidence from the selection. Teachers need to ask higher level questions, not just those from which answers can be selected from a list or a multiple choice format.

Detective fiction is a genre of writing that provides a wealth of opportunities to incorporate all of these strategies to improve reading skills. Whether their background comes from having read Encyclopedia Brown, Nancy Drew, and the Hardy Boys or from detectives portrayed on television, students certainly can identify some things which apply to detectives and detective fiction; hence, despite the sophistication we expect in this genre, it offers accessible points of departure.

One of the goals of the unit is to introduce more sophisticated adult literature to students. Although some of the vocabulary may be difficult, students need to be exposed to a variety of writing styles. The most difficult selection is the first, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" by Edgar Allan Poe. Since this is the pioneering detective story, it seems the appropriate place to begin. The strategy suggested with this selection is meant to acquaint students with the unique elements of this genre. Here the background information can be integrated with specific instruction to provide a good overview of classic detective fiction.

The second selection, "The Red-Headed League" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is much easier to read and understand. Students are required to focus on Sherlock Holmes's powers of observation, which directly relate to his ability to make predictions about people and events.

The final suggested reading is “And Then There Were None” by Agatha Christie. This novel is a departure from the other selections since the mystery is solved without the benefit of any detection by a specific main character. The task for this reading involves higher level thinking skills. Students are asked to develop a persuasive essay based on their interpretation of the appropriateness of the actions of Judge Wargrave.

In addition to the obvious skill development of these activities, there is opportunity also for students to work collaboratively and cooperatively. Collaborative learning is a group activity that asks students to work together on a task, such as writing a short story that conforms to the conventions of detective fiction. Cooperative learning is more structured; each group member is responsible for helping the others. This type of activity can be utilized in adapting portions of a short story or the novel for presentation in a Readers Theater format.

In accordance with these aims, this unit will:

1. Introduce and discuss the elements which are particular to detective fiction.
2. Provide the teacher with biographical notes on Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Agatha Christie.
3. Give a brief synopsis of the two short stories and the novel.
4. Include vocabulary development sheets with not only new or unfamiliar words, but also with words specific to this genre.
5. Develop lesson plans which will focus on the elements of the genre of detective fiction, the scientific method and powers of observation, and practice in writing opinion, expository, and persuasive essays.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Edgar Allan Poe is credited with writing the first detective story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” With this story and several others, he set down the standards for all future writers of detective fiction. The discussion that follows is meant to give a broad overview of the genre and subgenre of detective fiction. This is not meant to be a comprehensive discussion, but rather is presented as a brief introduction to the detective story. Much of the information is credited to Hillary Waugh from his book “Guide to Mysteries and Mystery Writing.”

Most detective stories, but not all, have as the main character an eccentric detective. He is the hero of the story. Special importance is placed on the thoughts, speech, and gestures of the detective. He is depicted as a “thinking machine,” somehow not quite a complete human being. He combines logic, scientific investigation, and creativity in his crime solving. The detective is mostly indifferent to the feelings of discomfort and misery in his fellows. Through some quirk of character, he has lost the ability to feel. For this reason, the detective prefers privacy, which is a sign of his separateness from the rest of the human race. In most cases he works

by himself and for himself, even though he may have an associate. This is true of Poe's Dupin, Doyle's Holmes, and Christie's Poirot, for example.

Many detective stories have an admiring and slightly stupid foil who chronicles the accomplishments of the detective. This companion is tolerated and is introduced as a contrast to the brilliance of the main character. Generally, these characters offer little stimulation to the detective, even though they may be on intimate terms.

Well-intentioned, blundering officials are standards in the genre. These characters utilize methodical reason which plods along and usually blinds them with detail. There is no possibility that any member of this group of officials can contribute to the solution of the mystery. Most are portrayed as stupid or, at their worst, incompetent men who are baffled or bewildered by the crime. Others are shown to be mistakenly confident and frequently overlook the clues causing them to arrest the wrong person. These characters often mock and laugh at the detective, labeling his oracular conclusions as ridiculous. They are contemptuous of his seemingly trivial and undignified actions in investigating the crime.

The staged ruse, which forces the criminal to reveal himself, is not a requirement for detective fiction, but it does present an interesting test for the reader when it is used by a writer: do we know why the detective is setting the kind of trap he is setting?

Finally, most detective fiction concludes with an explanation. This is the part of the story where all unsolved problems are answered. The more complicated the plot, the longer it takes for the detective to tie up the loose ends. Usually this exposition is done in the presence of the assembled "community" of characters in the story.

A subgenre of detective fiction is the "locked room." Although this is not a requirement of the detective story, many writers use it. There is some sort of enigma or apparent impossibility involved in the solution to the crime. It allows the detective to propose the most ingenious conclusions about not only the commission of the crime, but also the exit of the criminal from the room.

Many writers begin their stories with the impact of the crime, then work backwards to reconstruct the incomplete fragments of what is known into a more intelligible whole. The detective generally is never surprised and appears to consolidate trifling clues into a logical solution almost from the beginning. He rarely chats casually, but rather keeps his speech under control letting very little pertinent information out. Even his facial expression remains inscrutable.

Another subgenre is coming to the solution by putting oneself in the criminal's position. This technique allows the detective to use his intuitive powers. He identifies his intellect with the criminal's, thus discovering what that person must think or do. The detective's powers are unlimited because of his intense ability to concentrate. Since all minds are lesser than his, he can understand the motivations of any man. These intuitive detectives include Christie's Miss Marple and Chesterton's Father Brown.

Waugh continues his discussion by acknowledging that other conventions have come to be part of this genre. In addition to the lone detective who solves the crime openly and methodically, the detective story can involve a single criminal who is usually a very private, yet relatively prominent individual. The criminal should be indiscernible as the perpetrator of a crime until the end of the story; in the meantime, he should be depicted as an ordinary person. He generally is a cool, calculating amateur, though a man or woman with an intellect that is almost the match of the detective.

The crime of choice in detective fiction is murder. The victim must involve all the characters in suspicion, and, on some level, all characters must feel guilty whether they were involved in the crime or not, although frequently there are follow-up murders. Once in a while, each murder is committed by someone different. The corpse is briefly revealed, but is almost completely ignored and forgotten in the excitement of the ensuing investigation.

One final essential element to the detective story is the element of “fair play”. This means that the reader must have all of the clues the detective has. The reader may be unable to put them together for the reconstruction of the crime and may be caught unaware, but never should he be ignorant.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49) invented the modern detective story. Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 19, 1809. Orphaned at age three, he was raised by John Allan, a wealthy merchant of Richmond, Virginia. Although they did not get along, Poe took Allan as his middle name.

When Poe entered college at age seventeen, Allen only gave him a small allowance. Poe gambled and ran into great debt. He began to drink. Allan withdrew Poe from school, and Poe soon left home. Poe went to Boston in 1827, where he persuaded a printer to issue a pamphlet of his poems called “Tamerlane and Other Poems.” Credit was given simply to “A Bostonian.”

Poe spent a short time at the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., but could not take the discipline. His first success as a writer came in 1833, when he entered a short-story contest and won a prize of 50 dollars for the story “MS. Found in a Bottle.”

In 1835, he became the editor of the Southern Literary Messenger. At that time, he married his cousin Virginia Clemm, who was only 13. From 1837 to 1842, he worked as a free lance writer and editor in New York City and Philadelphia but earned very little. He tried to start his own magazine but failed, so he turned to freelance writing again. Even his best stories, such as, “Fall of the House of Usher” (1839); “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1843), considered the first detective story; and “The Gold Bug” (1843); sold for no more than 100 dollars each.

In 1844, Poe moved to New York City where he was well known in literary circles. He published “The Raven and Other Poems” in 1845. His wife died on January 30, 1847, of tuberculosis, and he became increasingly depressed.

In 1849, he disappeared in Baltimore and was found five days later drugged, intoxicated, and near death. He never regained consciousness and died four days later on October 7, 1849. The French poet, Charles Baudelaire, translated Poe’s works in the 1850’s and made Poe the first American author to be widely read outside the United States.

C. AUGUSTE DUPIN, DETECTIVE

C. Auguste Dupin, the first detective, was modeled after a real detective, Eugene Vidocq of the Surete. (This accounts for the Paris setting of the story.) Dupin is the prototype of Sherlock Holmes. Both use the same methodology and, ultimately, explain all of the ramifications of their investigations to the reader. Dupin’s motivation for solving the crime is the sheer love of testing his powers of reasoning. (Poe called this ability to reason logically “ratiocination.”)

Dupin was contemptuous of the Parisian police and their methods. He solved crimes by following paradoxical clues; circumstances that seemed mysterious often gave him the precise clue which led to the solution. Dupin represents intuition tempered with scientific knowledge. He describes himself as possessing elements of both the poet and the scientist. His analysis of the crime is so profound that it is intuitive.

Poe describes Dupin as a poor man of “illustrious parentage.” He is an avid reader and a heavy smoker. He is an eccentric and a romantic. Dupin remains in his room for a month at a time seeing no one. He lives in a small apartment at No. 33 Rue Dunot, Faubourg-St. Germain, with an anonymous friend who narrates the story. Dupin prefers to turn night into day, sleeping by day, sitting behind closed shutters at night reading and working by candlelight. He occasionally comes out, but only at night.

“The Murders in the Rue Morgue”

SYNOPSIS

The story begins with the introduction of Poe’s detective, M. Auguste Dupin, and his companion. Two gruesome murders have been committed. The mother has had a portion of her scalp ripped off and her head nearly severed from her neck; the daughter has been choked to death and her body stuffed up the chimney. Dupin learns of these murders through a newspaper report which tells of the murderer’s voice being heard during the commission of the crime, but not in a language those who heard it understood. Those who report hearing the voice are of different nationalities. It is from this, among other things, that Dupin deduces that the murderer’s sounds were not a language at all, and the killer was not human.

At the scene of the crime, Dupin finds that the doors have been locked from the inside, and the windows nailed shut. There is no way for the murderer to have escaped, yet he is gone. Dupin solves the problem.

In the conclusion, Dupin places an ad in the paper which lures a sailor to his address. This gentleman owned an orangutan which had committed the murders while he watched, unable to get to or control the animal. After solving the case, Dupin explains the aspects of the case which hadn’t been known before.

LESSON PLAN #1

OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce new vocabulary before reading the short story by using prepared vocabulary sheets.
2. To provide practice in writing an opinion essay.

PROCEDURE

“The Murders in the Rue Morgue” is a difficult story for middle school students to read on their own. For this reason, the story has been divided into three sections. As a suggestion, the first part of the story should not

be included.

The first portion begins with: “Residing in Paris during the spring and part of the summer of 18—, . . .” It introduces Dupin and the narrator, and the routine of their daily lives.

The second section begins: “Let it not be supposed from what I have just said . . .” This is the majority of the story containing the discussion of the crime which has been committed.

The third section begins: “Be ready,” said Dupin, “with your pistols . . .” This is the conclusion which reveals the solution to the crime.

Because of the difficult vocabulary, it is best for the teacher to read the short story aloud to the students while they follow along in the text. It will be necessary to stop at frequent intervals, perhaps after several paragraphs, to paraphrase what has just been read. The students use a journal to record the story’s events in their own words.

ACTIVITY

Poe’s murderer in the short story is an orangutan. In several paragraphs discuss your opinion of his choice of an exotic animal as the murderer in the story. Was Poe reluctant to use a human being as a murderer? Does the fear and fascination of the people of his time with the exotic and unusual animals trapped and brought to be put on exhibit influence his choice?

“The Murders in Rue Morgue”

Vocabulary—Part I

Complete each sentence with the correct vocabulary word.

illustrious grotesque enamored counterfeit analytic
sallied forth petulantly resolved abstract superfluities
candor

1. His _____ in revealing personal secrets was much appreciated.
2. The gargoyle on the building had a _____ face.
3. The money was not real but _____.
4. His ideas were not easy to understand because they were so _____.
5. The small group _____ excitedly to explore the zoo.
6. She thrust out her lower lip _____ when she didn’t get her way.
7. Abraham Lincoln was an _____ statesman.
8. The _____ of decoration were wasteful.
9. The boy was _____ of the girl.
10. Dupin’s _____ mind enabled him to solve the mystery.
11. He was _____ that all loose ends be tied up.

“The Murders in Rue Morgue”

Vocabulary—Part 2

Choose the letter of the correct word for each blank.

a. contention b. Napoleons c. aperture d. excoriations e. semblance f. transpired g. elicited h. snuff i. endeavor
j. gendarme

- ___ 1. argument, strife
- ___ 2. outward appearance
- ___ 3. attempt
- ___ 4 drew out
- ___ 5. French coins
- ___ 6. to happen; occur
- ___ 7. French police officer
- ___ 8. ground tobacco
- ___ 9. opening, hole
- ___ 10. places where skin has rubbed off
- k. bayonet n. garrets q. extol
- l. corroborate o. expostulate r. egress
- m. depose p. throttle s. perpetrator
- ___ 11. to choke; strangle
- ___ 12. praise highly
- ___ 13. exit
- ___ 14. small rooms under a sloping roof
- ___ 15. person committing a crime
- ___ 16. argue with another’s opinions
- ___ 17. to confirm
- ___ 18. give testimony under oath
- ___ 19. daggerlike weapon attached to a rifle
- aa. soliloquy dd. habiliment gg. remonstrance
- bb. denizens ee. prodigious hh. cognizant
- cc. trellis ff. paroxysms ii. queues
- ___ 20. aware; having knowledge
- ___ 21. clothing
- ___ 22. sudden and violent outbursts
- ___ 23. protest
- ___ 24. talking to oneself
- ___ 25. persons who live in a particular place
- ___ 26. single braid of hair; pigtail
- ___ 27. large amount
- ___ 28. crossed strips of wood or metal used as a screen or support

“The Murders in Rue Morgue”

Vocabulary—Part 3

Use context clues to determine the definition that matches the underlined vocabulary word in each sentence.

1. The sailor held tightly to the cudgel for protection. club cloth book club
2. The woman gesticulated at the car that splashed mud on her. smiled gestured sighed
3. Her sad countenance was due to the death of her dog. face mother problem
4. The police were able to capture the perpetrator of the crime. aircraft moment person who was guilty
5. The atrocities committed in Nazi prison camps are well documented. items cruelties sins
6. After tripping over the dog, he lay prostrate on the floor. flat playing modeling
7. The robber was culpable in committing the bank robbery. able to overdue guilty

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Arthur Conan Doyle was born in England on May 22, 1859. He died July 7, 1930. Doyle, who was a medical doctor, created the world’s best known fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes. The first Holmes story, “A Study In Scarlet”, appeared in “Beeton’s Christmas Annual” in 1887. It was followed by four novels and fifty-six stories about the sleuth. These included “The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes” (1894), and “The Hound of the Baskervilles” (1902). The last book by Doyle featuring the detective, “The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes,” was published in 1927. The detective and his companion, Dr. Watson, were so popular with the public that when Doyle tried to kill him off, he had to bring him back in “The Return of Sherlock Holmes” (1904).

Doyle also wrote science fiction novels featuring Professor Challenger in “The Lost World” (1911) and “The Poison Belt” (1912). It was his historical novels, “Sir Nigel” (1906), “Micah Clarke” (1889), and “The White Company” (1890) for which he would have liked to have been remembered. He was knighted in 1902.

SHERLOCK HOLMES, DETECTIVE

Sherlock Holmes, the most famous detective in fiction, was modeled on Dr. Joseph Bell, Doyle's professor of surgery at Edinburgh University. Doyle was impressed by his professor's ability to constantly surprise students by making a snap diagnosis or an unexpected conclusion based on logical "detection." Doyle understood the rapid progress being made in the natural sciences in the 19th century and, as a result, featured the scientific approach in his stories. He believed that close observation of factual details was the only sound basis for coming to sensible conclusions. His character, Sherlock Holmes, uses scientific investigation in solving crimes. Deduction is his principal tool, with observation a close second.

Holmes is portrayed as a six-foot tall, slender, hawk-nosed man who wears a deer-stalker cap and Inverness cape, clenching a calabash pipe in his teeth while seeking clues with the aid of a magnifying glass. He shares living quarters with Dr. John Watson, who narrates his adventures.

Holmes prefers to stay home at No. 221-B Baker Street, London, England. In his rooms, he listens to a client recount a puzzling case and frequently knows the answer to the problem before the person finishes speaking. A particularly difficult case is considered a "three pipe problem" requiring smoke and meditation for a satisfactory solution. When it is necessary to a case, Holmes is a master of disguise, often able to fool even Watson.

According to Watson, "Without his scrapbooks, his chemicals, and his homely untidiness, he was an uncomfortable man."

SYNOPSIS

"The Red-Headed League"

Mr. Jabez Wilson applies for a job advertised in the newspaper by the Red-Headed League. Since he fits all of the particulars specified, he is hired for the job: copying the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" in long hand. After being on the job for two months, he arrives one day to find the door locked with a sign attached notifying him that the Red-Headed League has been dissolved. At this point, he seeks assistance from Sherlock Holmes.

The story goes in a totally different direction than the reader expects as Holmes foils bank robbers who have used the cellar of Jabez Wilson's business establishment to dig underground and up under the basement floor of the bank which abuts his building.

LESSON PLAN #2

OBJECTIVES

1. To use a vocabulary sheet as an introduction to the lesson to enhance vocabulary.
2. To demonstrate how Sherlock Holmes combines the scientific method and his powers of observation.

PROCEDURE

"The Red-Headed League" is fairly easy reading for students once the new vocabulary has been introduced. The teacher may assign this as silent reading for the more proficient readers, while doing more of a directed lesson with those less able.

ACTIVITY

Sherlock Holmes has amazing powers of observation which allow him to learn many things about a person just by looking very carefully at that person. In an expository paragraph, describe how Holmes explains the following observations about Mr. Wilson:

Mr. Wilson:

had done manual labor

takes snuff

was a Freemason

had been in China

had done a great deal of writing

This information is found at the beginning of the story. Students can be directed to find similar evidence of Holmes's powers of observation further on in the story.

Vocabulary

Use the letter clues to form the word that matches each definition

florid	settee	embellish	pompous	chagrin
snuff	pawnbroker	rueful	languid	
introspect	propagation	askance		
hansom	labyrinth	contemplative	aperture	hoax
conundrum	compunction	ennui	bullion	solicitor

1. low, two-wheeled, one-horse carriage __ n s __
2. bars of gold or silver _ u l _ _ _ _
3. given to meditation; thoughtful _ _ _ _ _ m p _ _ _ _ _
4. decorate _ _ _ _ _ s h 5. with distrust or doubt _ s k _ _ _ _
6. trick or deception _ _ _ x 7. embarrassment _ _ _ g r _ _
8. feeling of discontented weariness or boredom _ n _ _ _
9. sofa big enough for two or three people __ t t _ _ _
10. opening or hole _ _ _ r t _ _ _
11. feeling of guilt or regret __ m p _ _ _ _ _
12. lacking energy or spirit _ _ _ g u _ _
13. reproduction _ _ _ _ _ g a _ _ _ _
14. riddle whose answer depends on a pun _ _ _ _ _ d r _ _

15. British word for lawyer _____ i t __ 16. examine one's own thoughts and emotions _ n t ____

17. person who lends money at interest on valuable objects left as security _____ b r _____ 18.
 maze __ b y _____
19. self-important _____ u s 20. having a ruddy, flushed color __ o r __
21. showing sorrow or regret _____ u l
22. tobacco ground into a fine powder and inhaled through the nostrils _____ f

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Agatha Christie was born Agatha Miller on September 15, 1890, in Devon, England. Her ingenious plots made her the foremost writer of detective novels of the 20th century. Her first manuscript, "The Mysterious Affair at Styles" in 1920, introduced the world to Hercule Poirot who, after Sherlock Holmes, became one of the most famous detectives in fiction. Miss Jane Marple, her other famous detective, first appeared in "Murder at the Vicarage" (1930). Her first major recognition came with the publication of "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" in 1926. Over the years she wrote about 75 successful novels.

Agatha Christie wrote a mystery play, "The Mousetrap" (1952). It set a world record for the longest continuous run at one theater. Several of her works such as "Witness for the Prosecution" (published 1953), "Murder on the Orient Express" (1934), and "Death on the Nile" (1937) were adapted for film.

She was married to Colonel Archibald Christie in 1914. They were divorced in 1928. She married archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan in 1930. Agatha Christie died at Wallingford in Oxfordshire on January 12, 1976.

"THE RED HERRING"

By definition, the red herring is meant to divert, or distract, attention from the main subject by introducing something irrelevant. Christie uses this literary device in "And Then There Were None."

Initially, the reader is misled by Judge Wargrave's mention of Lady Constance Culmington several times at the beginning of the novel making us believe that she invited him to the island. In fact, Wargrave shows the letter to the guests which was supposed to make his reason for visiting the island appear to be valid.

The second incident involves the staging of Wargrave's death. Wargrave could not have done this without the assistance of Dr. Armstrong. He took Armstrong into his confidence, and together they planned Wargrave's false death. They used red mud to form the head wound and dressed Wargrave in the red bathroom curtain and the grey knitting wool wig. The lighting in the room was dim and flickering so no one could really get a good look at the wound. Only Armstrong had to examine the wound closely so it was easy for them to convince the others that Wargrave was dead. Also, since the seaweed in Vera's room was believed to be a distraction planned by the murderer so that another murder could be committed, the others were easily taken in by the scheme.

LESSON PLAN #3

OBJECTIVE

To provide practice for student writing in the area of persuasive essays.

PROCEDURE

One of the objectives of the English teacher is to provide opportunities for students to become proficient in various aspects of written communication. The focus in the 8th grade is on persuasive writing. The following activity should be preceded by some introduction or review of the elements of this style of writing.

ACTIVITY

Discuss the pros or cons of the right of Wargrave to take vengeance on those who were outside the law. Include in the discussion the moral and religious implications of Wargrave's "taking the law into his own hands." Was Wargrave acting as a vigilante who was doing what the police could not legally do, or was this carefully planned series of murders really to satisfy his own desire to kill?

Students more adept at writing can do this activity on their own. Students who have more difficulty can work with the teacher to brainstorm ideas on both sides of the issues, and then, using the ideas generated by the group, to create an essay which expresses their personal views.

The teacher may want to take this assignment a step further and establish a debate session where opposing viewpoints are expressed.

"And Then There Were None"

Vocabulary (Chapters 1-6)

Think about the meaning of each vocabulary word then decide whether the statement is true or false.

1. His abode was destroyed by the flooding river.
2. His vision was bleary now that he had his new glasses.

3. Because he was surreptitious, everyone could figure out the card trick.
4. His mulish behavior revealed him to be a tartar.
5. The frequent change of activity made our vacation monotonous.
6. Ivory Snow is a very caustic soap.
7. Our shelves were replete with groceries, so we had to go food shopping.
8. Hungry animals will often forage in garbage cans.
9. When my friends came over after the game, we had an impromptu party.
10. The boy was scolded for his iniquitous ways.
11. Most classic novels are written in doggerel.
12. When solving a case, a detective must ferret for clues.
13. His manner was so brusque that he had many friends.

“And Then There Were None”

Vocabulary (Chapters 7—Epilogue)

Substitute one vocabulary word for each underlined word or phrase.

chaotic stiletto admonitory alibi wiry
 serene futile laconically geezer farce
 sagacity perjury truncheon conclave asphyxiation

1. It was useless to attempt to repair the shattered vase. _____
2. The eccentric old man always wore a winter coat in the summertime. _____
3. The calm lake showed not even a ripple. _____
4. The murder weapon was a small dagger with a thin, tapering blade. _____
5. The defendant was accused of telling a lie under oath. _____
6. The murderer’s excuse was proven to be untrue. _____
7. The robber hit the store owner with a short, thick staff. _____
8. The disorderly classroom was brought into order by the teacher. _____
9. Little children should not play with plastic bags, since they can cause death by suffocation.

10. The student was required to sum up the story briefly. _____
11. The Sioux sachem’s wisdom was well known and respected by all. _____
12. The Republican senators held a secret meeting in the executive chambers. _____
13. The lean, sinewy, strong boy was very athletic. _____
14. The teacher raised a (n) warning finger for silence. _____
15. The cursory investigation of the crime was ridiculous. _____

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

Students can be assigned the task of writing a mini mystery story. This activity can be tailored to the ability level of the group by supplying characters, crime, motive, weapon, setting, etc., to those less able; while more proficient writers can be left to their own devices. As an alternative, a small group of students may work cooperatively on this assignment where those of varying abilities can be assigned to work together.

Using the information on the standards of detective fiction, the students can either work independently or in small groups to identify and match elements of the short stories they have read with the conventions of the genre. The teacher may want to construct a chart on the board or on a ditto as a guide for the students which they can fill in.

An additional activity may be a visit to Gillette Castle State Park in East Haddam, Connecticut. The park was the former estate of William Gillette, the American actor and playwright who was renowned for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes. The castle was built from 1914-1919, and is patterned after medieval castles in Germany. Nineteen of its twenty-four rooms are open to the public. They contain unusual furnishings and belongings of the actor.

Finally, film versions of Sherlock Holmes's adventures and "And Then There Were None" are available for rental from most video stores. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the original versions with the screenwriters'/ directors' versions of the same material.

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