



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1999 Volume IV: Detective Fiction: Its Use as Literature and as History

Teaching Reading Comprehension and Writing Skills with "Whodunits"

Guide for Curriculum Unit 99.04.02
by Christine A. Elmore

Because the detective story possesses satisfying resolutions as well as fast-moving plots, it holds great appeal for readers of all ages. It challenges the reader to sort out clues, make judgments and arrive at conclusions in order to solve the mystery. Such high-interest stories have particular appeal for young readers and writers and, I believe, can serve to motivate even the most reluctant ones. Indeed, the mystery story is an ideal vehicle to encourage wide reading and to develop writing skills.

In this curriculum unit we will read books from four popular children's mystery series: Nate the Great, Meg Mackintosh, Sebastian Super-Sleuth and The Bloodhound Gang. As we explore the story elements we will note how well they follow the classic blueprint of the detective story. Our emphasis will be on improving reading comprehension skills and we will use a variety of oral and written retelling strategies to arrive at that end.

After immersing ourselves in these mystery stories, we will move on to writing a mystery story of our own, going through the writing workshop process of brainstorming, mapping out ideas, writing numerous drafts and conferencing regularly with the teacher. The final product will be a classroom-published mystery book.

Although designed for third-graders, this unit can easily be adapted to other grade levels.

(Recommended for Reading, Writing, Language Arts, Grade 3)

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>