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

Reading Clues Closely

Guide for Curriculum Unit 99.04.04
by John M. Oliver

The following Curriculum unit is intended for high school writing and English classes. Reading detective fiction and writing analytical responses is the primary goal. Since detective fiction, in order to be a tool for learning, must be put into a critical context, students will consider the elements of genre and topoi associated with it, various figures of speech, the historical setting of the book, the role of the narrator and so forth. Rather than stick just to detective fiction, this unit includes a discussion of T.S. Eliot's poetry and its use of allusions (where the reader who would uncover the secrets of a poem must be in many ways a detective), and an essay making comparisons between the formulaic nature of the poetry of Homer and the fiction of Raymond Chandler. It is my hope that my suggestive approach will prove both informative and entertaining to any teachers that open it, and especially applicable to a language arts and literature curriculum.

(Recommended for Writing, Creative Writing and English, grades 9-12.)

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