



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

Who Did Steal the Cookie from the Cookie Jar?

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by Kathleen Ware

The New Haven Public School system has made literacy its top priority. Through the use of the balanced literacy approach, the system plans to increase the reading competency of all its students.

Balanced literacy involves more than just a student's ability to read the printed page. Literacy includes the student's ability to read but also incorporates the child's desire to learn to read and write, the development of language concepts, the ability to apply phonemic awareness as the child encounters unfamiliar words, increased vocabulary, and the understanding and usage of letters and letter sounds.

The goal of the balanced literacy program is to produce children who enjoy reading, who are able to read and write, and who have the analytical skills needed to comprehend what they read. To achieve the purpose of the balanced literacy program, the children are exposed to a large variety of literary works. This includes both fiction and non-fiction literature.

The teacher acts as a model for the reading and writing process, including the children as much as possible until these roles become their own and the children emerge as young readers and writers.

Detective fiction, mysteries, and suspense stories lend themselves as an excellent source of literary work through which to capture the attention of children and adults alike. Through the use of detective fiction this unit will attempt to motivate the students to read and listen for detail, for pleasure, and will develop the skills necessary to become critical thinkers and analyzers.

Children as Detectives

Children are natural detectives. From the time of birth they are constantly seeking the answers to the who, what, and why of life. Any teacher or parent can verify that much of the young child's life is spent seeking for the answers to the mysteries of life. They are curious about everything around them.

As the young child grows and becomes more aware of his/her surroundings they begin to verbalize their quest for the answers by asking why, how come, what's that, etc. If the child is not satisfied with the responses given by the adult they'll circle back around and begin the barrage of questioning all over again. Any adult

who has survived such an encounter with a quizzical child can vouch for the fact that it feels very much like they've been through a series of interrogative sessions with some of the world's toughest interrogators. Why not take the child's natural ability to seek for answers and use it as the springboard for the introduction of detective fiction and the solving of a real mystery which has been custom made for their very own classroom? This is the goal of this unit.

Detective Fiction

In a detective or mystery story there is usually a baffling crime. The detective or the police officer is presented as the prime solver of a crime or mystery. The detective is the primary protagonist who tells a story as the first-person narrator or in the third person as portrayed by the author. It is the detective who interrogates suspects, investigates clues, and finally tracks down the perpetrator of the crime thereby solving the mystery. The author may share all known clues with the reader as they unfold but usually holds the significance of the clues until the end.

A short detective or mystery story usually concentrates on one main event and may involve one or more characters. The mystery presents a problem or conflict and the detective moves to resolve it. The mystery is presented as having a beginning, middle and an end. It can be long or short and can encompass one page or many.

Introducing Detective Fiction

I've divided this unit into two parts. The first part consists mainly of shared reading activities and will act as a stimulus to whet the appetites of the children for detective fiction. During this portion of the unit, the children will listen to stories, discuss these stories, make predictions as to what might happen next or whom they think committed the offense, and finally, draw conclusions about several children's books involving some type of mystery. It is here that the vocabulary often found in detective fiction will be developed.

The time allotted to the reading of mystery and detective stories can be unlimited. It is not the purpose of this unit to restrict the reading of this literature. Since young children love to hear stories, they may request these type stories at any time once they've been introduced to them. However, for the sake of this unit it will be necessary to introduce some of these stories in a given time frame in order to develop vocabulary and to introduce the tools of the trade which the children will need to know for the execution of the actual mystery. I've therefore chosen to read two children's mystery stories over the course of two weeks. The first book from The Boxcar Children, *The Mystery of the Missing Cat* by Gertrude C. Warner series will be used as a primer to detective fiction. Next we will explore *Julian, Secret Agent* by Ann Cameron. The third book, *The Adventures of Mary Kate and Ashley, The Case of the Fun House Mystery*, by Nancy E. Krulik, will be used for developing vocabulary and presentation of the "dress" which many fictional detectives are portrayed as wearing.

The second portion of this unit, "Who Did Steal the Cookie from the Cookie Jar", involves the perpetration of an actual mystery, gathering of "evidence" and clues, the considering of suspects, and finally the resolution or solving of the mystery. I've chosen to begin this part on a Friday and end it the following Friday, thereby giving six days for the development and completion of this section of the unit.

I have not decided whether the children will be informed that they will have a mystery of their own to solve. It may be suggested that it would be nice if they did have their own real live mystery to solve. I think the

element of surprise, however, will help keep the children's attention and interest more than if they knew this was a planned event.

Building Vocabulary

Many professionals and trade persons have certain distinguished features, which are particular to their profession. People associate a white laboratory coat, stethoscope, and prescription pad to a doctor while the blue uniform and walkie-talkie is most always analogous with the police officer. Nurses are most always associated with the white nursing cap while the classroom teacher is normally seen as always reading a book and wearing spectacles.

Not only are professions associated by their dress but also there is normally a "language" or "jargon" which can be prescribed to each profession. The classroom teacher may use words like behavior modification, guided reading, and the balanced literacy approach. To the person who has no knowledge of the teaching profession these words may need to be clarified by definition. The police officer responds to a request by saying, "Roger" which means yes or I acknowledge, and may use many other codes and symbols as he relates to those who share his/her profession. Though these codes and symbols may be easily recognized by the seasoned police officer the rookie needs to be trained to understand what the police jargon is all about. He/she learns this jargon through exposure and usage.

Detective fiction, mysteries, and suspense stories also have a vocabulary that is associated with these type stories. The children will need to develop this vocabulary in order to "speak" the language of the detectives. They will be encouraged to use this detective jargon as they go about seeking for information to the solution of this mystery and in their writing, thereby increasing vocabulary.

Young children also like to role-play. They love to dress up and act like their parents or teacher. The children may also "dress" the part of the detective. One of the most famous detectives known was Sherlock Holmes. This detective is synonymous with his trench coat and declaration, "elementary, my dear Watson", though this phrase does not appear in any of the literature but is a product of film.

The children's series, "The Adventure of Mary Kate & Ashley, The Fun House Mystery," lends itself to the development of a dress code for the young detectives and the acquiring of the detective vocabulary. This series involves identical twin sisters who love to "solve" mysteries and crimes. These sisters consider themselves to be detectives. They dress the part, as displayed in their professional name, "The Trenchcoat Twins". Through the use of this book and the others previously mentioned, I will introduce the children to some of the necessary tools of the trade: the tape recorder, magnifying glass, camera, plastic bags, fingerprinting techniques, rubber gloves, and of course, the note pad. Vocabulary will also be introduced to the children as they search for "clues", consider possible "suspects", and discuss "suspicious" persons, contemplate motives and opportunities.

Lesson Plan #1

Objective:

To introduce basic vocabulary commonly associated with detective/mystery stories.

Materials:

Book: The Adventures of Mary Kate & Ashley, The Fun House Mystery; chart paper, magic mark, vocabulary words

1. mystery
2. detective
3. disguise
4. clue
5. suspect
6. investigate

Procedure:

1. Read the title of the book to the children and give them the chance to predict what they think the book will be about.
2. Give the children the opportunity to share any experiences they may have had with carnivals and/or fun houses.
3. Explain that this is a long story and because of its length it has been divided into parts called "chapters" and that you will read one or two chapters per day, depending on the age and attention span of the children.
4. List the words on chart paper and explain that these are words that will help them to understand what detectives do. Brainstorm with the children for possible definitions of these words.
5. As you read the story, explain each word listed, and write its meaning on the chart.
6. Review the meanings frequently with the children.

Lesson Plan #2

Objective: To present the vocabulary developed in problem solving or riddle form.

Materials: Vocabulary words, teacher-made riddles Procedure:

1. After introducing the children to basic detective/mystery vocabulary, reinforce by presenting the vocabulary in a problem solving or riddle form.

2. Read the following riddles to the children and allow them to solve them.

-I am a person who usually works on a police force
I solve crimes and gather secret information.
I am a (detective).

-I am something that is not known
I may be a secret and make people curious
I am a (mystery).

-It makes me look different
I hide so I'm not known
I may use makeup, acting, or clothes
It is a (disguise).

-I am a closed box

I am used for taking pictures
What am I? (camera)

-I am a person who may be guilty of committing a crime
I may be looked on with suspicion
I am a (suspect)

Introduction to the Mystery

Children and adults alike love to participate in the singing of the song, "Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar?" The mystery of the missing cookie when sung by children and adults is most times left unanswered. The final person in the round of singing usually ends the quest for the answer by passing the blame back to the originator of the song. I have chosen this favorite song as the plot for the mystery to be developed and solved by the kindergarten children in my class. Though this unit is being prepared for children of kindergarten age, it can be easily adapted to meet the needs and interest of children of a variety of ages and abilities.

The Setting for this Mystery

The setting for this mystery will take place in surroundings with which the children are familiar and feel quite comfortable, their classroom and school.

Laying the Ground Work for the Mystery

Preparation of the Staff

The nature of this unit necessitates that the children work collaboratively in small groups and as a class, and involves the collaborative efforts of the teaching staff of the school. To execute this unit successfully, it will be necessary to explain this project to the entire school staff. Knowing the staff at my school, I am confident of the co-operation and enthusiasm of every individual and therefore look forward to the positive execution of this unit.

I will obtain permission from the principal to solicit the participation and co-operation of staff members for this project. Since this unit requires the participation of the majority of the staff, I will probably seek to present the project during a staff meeting when most of the staff members are present. I will prepare the clue cards for use by the cookie thief in advance so that they can so that the staff can get a clear view of the nature of this project. These clue cards will be clearly designated as Clue #1, Clue #2, Clue #3, Clue #4 or Day #1, Day #2, Day #3, etc. The clue cards will be presented latter in the unit. (You may however wish to devise clues that may be more appropriate for your situation.)

I will explain to the staff that I'll need all of their co-operation in the execution of this project and that I will need one member to assume the role of coordinator and culprit. This member will be the one to collaborate the efforts and actions of all other staff members. For example, in clue #3, the cookie thief tells you that she is wearing earrings. The coordinator will need to instruct several teachers not to wear earrings that day so that they don't fit the description and can be eliminated as a possible suspect. (You may want this person to be anonymous to yourself. This will make the unit more exciting and will keep you on your toes along with the children.)

The Mystery

1, 2,3, Oh, No!

Where did that Cookie Go?

In my classroom, Friday is the day when the children relax with table games, floor puzzles, etc. The children pair off into groups and enjoy the day's activities. This is normally the time when rewards are also given out for a week's worth of good work. Therefore, when I present a cookie jar filled with cookies, though a welcome treat, it will not be a total surprise to the children. I will be sure that there are enough cookies for each child and the adults who work in the classroom and there will be an extra large, extra special cookie placed at the bottom of the jar. This is the cookie that is left over. It is also the cookie that is taken.

After sharing the cookies with the children, I will elaborate on the idea that there is a cookie left over and wow! Is it big! And doesn't it look delicious! The children will want to eat it right away, but I'll insist that they've had enough cookies for the day and that we'll just leave this one here in the cookie jar to share on Monday with the class. You may want to discuss that one cookie won't go far with so many children, but that you'll share it anyway. This encourages the children to share with each other and binds them together collectively as they anticipate the eating of the cookie. I'll secure the cookie in plastic wrap and place it in the cookie jar carefully. After placing the top on the cookie jar and I'll place it in a very conspicuous place in the classroom where all the children can see it.

The coordinator will communicate with the custodian or principal to have access to the classroom so that they may remove the cookie from the jar on the first Friday of the actual mystery. They will also communicate to the staff the role each staff member will play each day, eliminating certain teachers on a daily basis until finally all clues point to the cookie thief.

By the end of this unit the children should not only have solved the mystery of the missing cookie but should also be more fully acquainted with the teaching staff at the school.

The mystery begins when the children discover that the cookie jar has been tampered with and the cookie is gone!

The Clues

Each day the coordinator/culprit will also be responsible for leaving the daily clue either in the teacher's mailbox, taped to the door, or in some obvious place where it can be "found" early enough each day so that the children may actually do some "investigating." Since the majority of the staff members at the school at which I teach are women, many of the clues after the first will be geared mainly to women.

Clue #1 (Monday)

I heard that you've been reading about mysteries,

I'm here to help you out!

I leave a clue each morning,

You decipher what this mystery's about!

I am a staff member at your school!

Clue #2 (Tuesday)

Well, I see you're up and running,

Trying to find that cookie fast,

Take your time and gather the evidence,

Oh! I hope that cookie will last!

I am a classroom teacher at your school!

Clue #3 (Wednesday)

You think you're getting closer

By your bright-eyed look, I can tell

Well, I say you better hurry,

That cookie has a delicious smell!

You'll see me today wearing earrings.

(Your coordinator will need to collaborate with the teaching staff so that only approximately half of the teachers are wearing earrings that day.)

Clue #4 (Thursday)

You're cold, your lukewarm, you're hot!

You're pretty good at what you do,

I'm glad that you're such smart kids,

Now, here's another clue!

Today I'm wearing black slacks and a sweater.

(By now the coordinator should have eliminated three-quarter of the teaching staff. He/she should also have eliminated all teachers who teach the same grade as he/she.)

Clue #5 (Friday)

I think you're really on the ball,

You're only considering a few,

Today I think you'll get back that cookie,

So, here's the final clue!

I'm a teacher of children in the _____ grade.

(The teacher, who has the cookie, should fill in his/her grade, before leaving this final clue. Remember that the coordinator has previously eliminated any other teacher(s) on his/her grade level.)

Let's Investigate

Suggest to the children that since they are to be the detectives in the solving of this mystery, they should be equipped with the necessary tools to do a detective's job. Ask the children if they remember from previous mysteries that they've seen or read what tools detectives use as they did their detective work. Once the children are fully equipped with vocabulary and tools, send them out on the investigative search. The following schedule of investigative events has been outlined for use with children of kindergarten age.

The first clue identifies the cookie thief as a member of the school staff. This includes the entire staff both male and female, custodian, classroom teachers, principal, etc.. The first thing the children need to do is to gather the names of all staff members. The children will need to be supervised during this activity. When the children return to class, this information will need to be recorded as outlined in Lesson plan #5.

Lesson Plan #3

Tools of the Trade

Objective:

- To learn the basic tools used by a detective
- To create a pictorial web of these basic tools
- To understand how these tools help the detective in his/her work

Materials:

- Large sheet of drawing paper
- Magic Marker

Book: The Adventures of Mary-Kate & Ashley
The Case of the Fun House Mystery

Procedure:

In advance read the book to the children.

Review the book, reading the portion that provides the information needed.

Ask the children what things or the detectives needed tools
in order to do their job?

Record those tools in the web on the drawing paper

Children may choose to illustrate the words on the web.

Lesson Plan #4

Gathering the Names of Potential Suspects

Objective:

To gather the names of all staff members at the school.

To record the names of the staff members on strips of paper

To eliminate suspects

To solve the mystery

Tools:

Strip of manuscript paper
Pencil or magic marker
Detective attire

Procedure:

1. Daily, send children out in small groups. Have the children inquire of the suspects if they are a member of the school staff. If the "suspect" answers in the affirmative; instruct the children to write down the suspects name on their slip of paper and return to the classroom with the names. (Young children should be supervised during this activity.)
2. List all the names of potential suspects on chart paper. You may choose to list the names in alphabetical order. This would be a fine opportunity to introduce alphabetizing.
3. Check or star the first box next to the suspect's name to indicate that this person fits the first clue given. (This gives the list of names to be used in the suspect analysis chart of lesson 5.

Lesson Plan #5

Analysis of Potential Suspects

Objective:

To eliminate potential suspects through the use of an analytical grid.
To identify the cookie thief

Materials:

Grid, magic marker, and list of classroom teachers

Procedure:

1. Choose several children to be the "detectives" for the day.
2. Provide them with the first clue, "a staff member".
3. Allow the children to go throughout the building and gather the names of all staff members (this will include the nurse, custodian, etc.) List the staff member's name on the left-hand side of the paper. (This would be a fine time to introduce alphabetizing by listing all staff members names in alphabetical order.
4. Make grid lines with five columns going across.
5. List clue #1 on the top of the first row of grid boxes: staff member.
6. Have the children place a check next to each name that fits the first clue. On day number one, all names will be checked.
7. In the second heading, place the second day's clue: Classroom teacher. Again, send out your detectives to gather all the names of the classroom teachers.
8. Upon arriving back at the classroom with the names, have the children place a check next to the names that fit the second clue. (Those names that don't fit the clue are automatically eliminated from the list of potential suspects.)
9. Continue this process until all clues have been investigated, suspects eliminated, and the real cookie thief identified.

Each day the children receive a new clue, investigate and match potential suspects to the given clue, have them devise some method of recording the possible suspects. They may want to place a sticker or a check in the box next to the name of the person(s) who fits the day's clue. Anyone who does not fit all the clues is eliminated as a possible suspect. Be sure to use this as an opportunity for the children to develop analytical skills by discussing with the children why this suspect fits or does not fit the day's clue. For example: Day #2's clue states that the person is a classroom teacher. This would eliminate the principal, staff developer, social worker, etc. Only classroom teachers would receive the identifying "sticker" or "check" under clue #2 next to their name. Therefore some of the staff who were fit the description given in clue #1 as staff members would be eliminated under clue #2, such as the custodial staff, staff developer, social worker, nurse, etc. As the clues become more specific, the suspects become fewer until finally there is only one person who fits the last clue and the children will be able to clearly identify the person responsible for the removal of the cookie.

Closing the Unit

Before the final day of the mystery, purchase or bake enough cookies for the children in your classroom and those in the class of the cookie monster. Inform the coordinator that you would like them to be glad that the mystery is solved and to tell the children that he/she has plenty of cookies to share with the entire class. Celebrate the solving of the mystery by having a cookie bash (and if you try hard enough perhaps the entire school staff will join in on this end of the mystery celebration by either baking or purchasing enough cookies

for their class. And 1,2,3, of no!! Watch that pile of cookies grow!

Unit Follow-up

At the close of this unit, the children should be more familiar with the personnel who are responsible for their care while in the school environment. The question remains, do they really understand the role played by these auxiliary personnel. The following lesson gives the opportunity for the children to participate in an informal learning environment which will enhance their understanding of the roles of all school personnel.

Lesson Plan #7

Career Stake-out

Objective:

To learn the importance of the auxiliary staff members at school
To provide an informal discussion of various career opportunities

Materials:

Mentors (if possible)
Books on various careers

Procedures:

1. Choose an auxiliary staff member to invite to the classroom to speak with the children about his/her job
2. Read or talk with the children prior to the arrival of the guest about the type of work this person does
3. Allow the guest to talk with the children about their particular profession
4. Allow the children to ask questions

Follow-up

1. Let the children make a career journal.

Student Bibliography

Cameron, Ann. Julian, Secret Agent, Random House, New York, N.Y., 1988.

From rescuing a dog stuck in a hot car to keeping a toddler from drowning, Secret agent Julian, Huey, and Gloria have done a nice bit of crime-busting. But what they really want is to nab a real live bank robber and get the big \$25,000 reward! And just when it looks like they might get their man, the police chief steps in, and the super sleuths find that they're the ones who are in trouble, with a capital T!

Krulik, Nancy E.. The Adventures of Mary Kate & Ashley: The Case of the Fun House Mystery, Scholastic, Inc., 1996.

The twins find mysteries to solve Wherever they go. Even at the Tons of Fun Amusement Park. It was really fun at the park, until they entered the Fun House. Something big and fuzzy grabs Mary Kate's arm and that's when the mystery begins.

Warner, Gertrude Chandler. The Boxcar Children: The Mystery of the Missing Cat, Scholastic, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1994.

Mr. Spotzie's cat is missing. The Boxcar children set out to find it using Lost Cat posters and door-to-door searching with the cat's photograph. Along the way they encounter some strange characters, receive frightening phone calls, and even find a cat that looks just like Spotzie-but is it? The more they search, the more mysterious the mystery becomes.

Adult Bibliography

The assigned reading list for the seminar, Detective Fiction, was divided into categories. The categorizing of the books can be helpful when reading is being assigned to a particular topic or course of study. The category for each book listed in the adult bibliography is given in parenthesis at the end of the annotation. For the young child, the reading tends to be more of an interrogative or puzzle type story. A puzzle story is presented as a cause and effect story and is particularly helpful when the objective is to have children focus on facts and solve a mystery.

Chandler, Raymond. The Big Sleep, Vintage Books, New York, N.Y., 1939.

Meet Philip Marlow, a thirty-eight-year-old private detective who moves through the seamy side of Los Angeles in the 1930's. His case involves a paralyzed California millionaire, two psychotic daughters, blackmail, and murder. (American Private Eye Tradition)

Follett, Ken. Eye of the Needle, Arbor House, New York, N.Y., 1978.

It's 1944 and the time is quickly approaching D-Day. The Allies are putting forth a valiant effort to keep the plan out of the hand of the Germans. "Die Nadel," also known as "The Needle," has been planted in London years before. He has discovered the secret that will destroy the Allies and defeat the D-Day landing-if he can only escape to Germany with it. (Spy Story)

James, P.D.. An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, N.Y., 1972.

Cordelia Gray finds herself the sole proprietress of a private detective agency after the suicide of her partner Bernie Pryde.

He first independent assignment is to investigate the death of Mark Hallenger, whose father is the brilliant and forceful leader of a team of scientists. Before Cordelia completes the investigation there are two more deaths, a brush with a police chief and a non-stop sequence of suspense, excitement, and surprise. (Puzzle Element)

McClure, James. *The Steam Pig*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, N.Y., 1971.

A suspense story set against a South African background, involves the murder of a young girl who superficially appeared to be an ideal tenant, yet with the odd characteristic of the artistic. Steam pig extracts the narrative from the apartheid government of South Africa. (Moral Dilemma)

Mosley, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Pocket Books, New York, N.Y., 1990.

It's 1948 in the town of Los Angeles and Easy Rawlins, a black war veteran has just been fired from his job. Wondering how he'll meet his mortgage, Easy is approached by a white man in a linen suit, who offers good money if only Easy will locate a blond woman by the name of Daphne Monet, who frequents black jazz clubs...(Ethnic Detective)

Parker, Robert B.. *Looking for Rachel Wallace*, Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, New York, N.Y., 1980.

Private detective, Spenser, has the ominous job of protecting Rachel Wallace, a lesbian feminist. She's tough, proud and doesn't particularly appreciate his style. She's kidnapped after an argument that leaves Spenser without a job and Wallace without Spenser's protection. Spenser, sets out to find the feminist writer and meets with a steady stream of interesting characters. (American Private Eye Tradition)

Sayers, Dorothy L.. *The Nine Tailors*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, N.Y..

From the strange, flat fen-country of East Anglia, which has accustomed itself to the noise of the internal combustion engine and the wails of the jazz band, the people are found to be highly sensitive to the blasphemous ringing of the church bell which is made to the glory of God. Their complaints evoke an investigation which results in the discovery of an unknown man's death. (Moral Dilemma)

Trevor, Elleston.. *The Tango Briefing*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York, N.Y., 1973.

Quiller, who is London's top-secret Bureau agent, is back in a new adventure which will test his professional cool to the limit. He is sent to search for the wreckage of a small cargo plane which carried some letters called "Tango Victor" when it crashed in a sandstorm. Quiller assumes the cargo is deadly and is sent on non-stop action which results in a masterful novel of international espionage at its deadliest. (Straight narrative)

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