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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

Using Detective Fiction to Raise Interest in High School Readers

Guide for Curriculum Unit 99.04.09
by Barbara W. Winters

Detective fiction can ignite interest in reading among teenagers. Finding the "right" materials for students who are reading far below grade level is a major task for a teacher. The theory behind this unit is that the works of Walter Mosley, a contemporary African American novelist and Easy Rawlins, a central character in a series of Mosley's books in particular, will prove both familiar and attractive. It is Easy's voice that tells about everyday life on the streets of Los Angeles. It is Easy who finds personal troubles with the cops as he attempts to solve a murder, or two. Mosley has written about this character in an environment of rich, but easily read language. Several of the works are available on audiotape and others, like *Devil in the Blue Dress*, can be found on the shelves of the local video stores. I offer Mosley's written work as a mechanism for reading instruction, whether it is the elementary skills such as word decoding or the higher level skill of increasing speed. In fact, I believe that young people will find that their families and friends will also want to read *A Little Yellow Dog* along with them.

(Recommended for English (Repeat), Basic English, and Comprehensive English, grade 9.)

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