Whodunnit?

MYSTERIES

Quick Teaching Guide

Step 1:

The basic premise of each Whodunnit? Mystery is that your students are role-playing as "analyst detectives." In this role, they are to analyze a first-person narrative, in the form of a fictional investigation report, and try to conclude which suspect is the culprit. So, the first step is to actually give the case file to your students, and allow them some time to read it.

You can print and give your students the case file in paper form, or instruct them to open the PDF on any computing device, and read it in digital form.

Before you distribute the case file, you may wish to sort of "set the scene," if you will, by telling your students that "The Whodunnit? Detective Agency" needs their help with an important case. How much theater you put into this preface, and how much you play along, versus openly admitting the case is fictional, is entirely up to you. Yet, because included with each case file is an introductory letter that explains the students' roles anyway, you shouldn't have to do too much to get your kids started.

In terms of reading timeline, you have a few options. The first is to allow your students class time to read the entire case file in one sitting. Another idea is to assign it as homework. Alternatively, because each case file consists of a 5-day investigation, you can also elect to break-up the reading over the course of a school week—assigning your students a new day of the report, well, every day.

Step 2:

After your students have digested the case file, I always suggest you allow them time to discuss it in small groups, or even as a whole class, with you, as the teacher, directing the discussion. You'll find that this part can be a lot of fun, as many of your students will have strong opinions about which suspect

they think is the culprit. Heated arguments, and disagreements, are not uncommon. This is because each Whodunnit? Mystery is written in a way that any of the suspects could be rationally argued as being the culprit.

As your students discuss the details of each case, I recommend you always prompt them to verify their claims with actual excerpts from the text. This will consistently reinforce the power of reading with purpose in your students—which is a wonderful skill for each student to improve upon.

Of course, this period of oral discussion, though beneficial, is optional. If you elect to do it, how you organize it will depend a lot upon how your students work best together. A fun tactic I like to use with my students is to take a quick poll as to how many of them believe which suspect is the culprit, before the discussion begins, and then retake the poll after the discussion, to see how beliefs have changed. It's always interesting to see the power of persuasion play out among my students, in real time.

Step 3:

As analyst detectives, and "employees" of a detective agency, your students must provide an analysis in written form via their "case evaluation." Each mystery comes with a standard evaluation form. After all, part of being a detective is paperwork. Ha. Each time you use a Whodunnit? Mystery with your students, simply assign them to complete the evaluation, either by hand in printed form, or by typing directly into the PDF on their screens, saving it, and then sending it to you for review as the "supervising detective." You can also allow your students to write an evaluation using their word processor of choice, or even type it directly into an email and send it to you, if you have more of a paperless classroom.

Whether you elect to grade, or give academic credit, for a student's written case evaluation is up to you. If you do so, the case resolution included with every mystery outlines the various, logical arguments that can be made to either implicate, or exonerate, the suspects. So, if you are giving a grade, you will likely want to base it, at least somewhat objectively on how many logical conclusions the student made. The resolution is also valuable for leading oral discussion with your students, as it helps to ensure that, as the teacher, you know everything. Hehe.

For years, the simple and easy way I have graded student case evaluations is by using the following bifurcated scale that balances reasoning with suspect selection: Logical reasoning + correct suspect = A; Logical reasoning +

incorrect suspect = B; Faulty reasoning + correct suspect = C; Faulty reasoning + incorrect suspect = D; Poor participation = F.

Step 4:

After discussion, and written evaluation, it is time to present your students with the "case resolution." Depending on the specific mystery, this will be in the form of a suspect confession, news article, or other update from the agency, that informs the student of the culprit's identity. Your students finding out if they were right, or not, is the payoff that makes Whodunnit? Mysteries such captivating reading assignments.

As such, be sure to not accidentally give out the resolution, along with the case file, at the outset of the assignment. Otherwise, your students will be done, before they even begin. Eeek!

Step 5:

Repeat steps **1** to **4** with a new mystery. Yay!

Questions?

If you need assistance regarding using my mysteries with your students, or have a quick question, please do not hesitate to reach out via email:

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I'll be happy to help.