
LEARNING THROUGH THE NEWS

WRITE A DETECTIVE STORY

SUGGESTED TIME: Will vary, depending on teacher's discretion.

AIM: The students will:

- Create a detective story, applying their knowledge of the genre, and based on a real-life crime covered in the newspaper.



MATERIALS: Newspapers, writing materials and assignment sheet.

PROCEDURE:

From Edgar A. Poe to Sherlock Holmes, detective fiction has long been a favorite genre of readers and authors alike. We all like on-the-edge-of-our-seats suspense. Most mystery writers agree that when writing a mystery, one must begin at the end. In other words, the author has to know what the outcome is going to be before he writes.

1. Using a newspaper story for inspiration, choose a crime to be the subject of your tale: missing jewels, a murder, a child's disappearance. Decide who committed the crime. How did he do it? Why did he do it?
2. Describe the crime scene including any clues. Evidence may be given by witnesses telling what they saw or heard.
3. Gather suspects. In a short story, don't try to have more than three. All of the suspects should have motives (reasons to have committed the crime), means (the tools necessary to have pulled off the job), and opportunity (time to be in the location where the crime was committed.)
4. Consider what "red herrings" you can use to confuse the reader. (A red herring is a smelly fish. When it is dragged across the trail of a criminal, the smell confuses the bloodhounds tracking him.) Similarly, you may want to make the reader think that suspects other than the true criminal are guilty.
5. Weave hints about the real criminal into the plot. The reader should be able to use deductive reasoning to guess the outcome.
6. Have your detective solve the puzzle. An ironic or twisted ending will delight the reader. Make your characters colorful but the descriptions brief. Maintain suspense and keep your reader guessing to the end.

— *adapted from an activity submitted by Kim McDermott, English Instructor, Grade 11, Garrett Academy of Technology, Charleston, SC.*

National Learning Standards: *Language Arts-#2 Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres ... #5 Students apply a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. National Council of Teachers of English/ International Reading Association List of Standards for the English Language Arts, 1996;*