

Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Teacher,

Mysteries appeal to students' analytical minds as they bond with the protagonist-detective to solve the crime or series of crimes. A good mystery writer tries to trick readers by throwing red herrings into the plot. A red herring takes readers on a detour of misleading clues to confuse them about which suspect is the criminal. Watch out, too, for hidden evidence—details that seem unimportant when first encountered, but can become clues to the crime as the story unfolds. Then there are the alibis—suspects will have alibis that show where they were when the crime was committed, but the alibi of one suspect won't ring true! Finally, suspense is king in mysteries as the author builds tension and uncertainty about who did it and at times leaves us hanging on to the edge of a cliff at the end of a chapter. Share mysteries you enjoy reading so kids know that this genre is a favorite of all ages!

Laura Robb

START WITH YOURSELF:

Read aloud mystery picture books or short novels to introduce and/or review the language students need to know to enjoy this genre. As you read aloud, think aloud and answer the questions that follow. Doing this gives students the road map they need to navigate mysteries!

What is the *mystery*?

Who is the *detective*?

Who are the *suspects*? What are their *alibis*?

Who are the *witnesses*?

What are the *clues*?

What was the *scene of the crime*?

What was the *motive* for the crime?

What are *red herrings*?

When was the *breakthrough*?

Mystery

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When you read aloud the next mystery, ask these questions, but have students turn and talk before volunteering to answer. Knowing the terminology found in mysteries can enhance students' enjoyment and understanding of these books and transform them into mystery fans.

MOVE TO STUDENTS:

Check out dozens of mysteries from your school's media center that are appropriate for the students you teach. Display the books on tables and desks and invite students to choose two to three and browse. Once they've selected a "good fit" book (see pages 2–3 in the realistic fiction guide), invite students to chunk their books. Give them sticky notes and have them divide the book into three to five chunks. When chunking, students can place a sticky note at the end of a chunk and write "stop to think" on each note.

After students complete a chunk, pair them up, and have them select and discuss a few questions/prompts from the list below. Remind students to offer text details and/or inferences to support their thinking.

- How does the author build suspense? Find two passages, cite the page each one is on, and explain how the author created suspense.
- How do the settings affect the mystery to be solved?
- What personality traits does the main character possess that make him/her a terrific detective?
- Why did the protagonist-detective become involved in the mystery?
- What dangers surround the detective as he/she works to solve the mystery?
- Identify a red herring and explain how it led you away from important clues.
- What clues gave you that breakthrough moment and enabled you to solve the mystery?
- Did the detective have any assistants? If he/she did, choose one and discuss the personality traits that made him/her a great helper.
- Who were the suspects and what were their alibis?
- What was the motive for the crime? How did the crime affect others?
- Explain why you do or don't feel justice was done at the end of the book.

NOTEBOOK WRITING

- Make a list of the suspects in the mystery you read. Next to each suspect, write his/her alibi.
- What clue or clues enabled you to solve the mystery? Note these and explain what you learned from each one.
- Choose a question that you and your partner discussed. Head a page in your notebook, and write the title and author of the mystery you read and the question you chose. Jot notes for your response. Then, turn your notes into complete sentences that include text evidence.

SHARED WRITING TEACHING TIP:

Have fun with students by collaborating to plan and write a mystery!

- Start with your detective. Decide personality traits, gender, age, background, etc.
- Think up a mystery and the plot or events surrounding it.
- What are some settings?
- Who commits the crime? What are the person's motives?
- What is the crime scene?
- Who are the suspects (limit these to two or three)?
- How will you start the story?
- Include dialogue.

Start drafting on large chart paper:

- Start by you writing the lead or opening.
- Have students contribute and you write their suggestions on the chart.
- Reread and revise to vary the openings of sentences, build suspense, and do some showing instead of telling.
- Collaborate on revising content first, then edit for punctuation and usage.
- Create a book for your class library. Print the story, spreading it over several pages. Then, have students choose a title, design the cover, and illustrate parts of the story. Include a dedication and title page, and add an "about the authors" paragraph on the inside back cover.

