

**Subject: Reading Comprehension, Writing**

**Duration: 10 Days**

### **The Making of a Mystery**

In this lesson, students will use a Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF) to map out and eventually compose an exciting mystery that contains all of the 'ingredients of a mystery' that they have been exposed to throughout the previous lessons in this unit. They will end the lesson by publishing their own mystery.

By [Beth Newingham](#)

#### **Objectives:**

##### **Students will:**

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the story elements in a mystery
2. Follow the mystery format to write a mystery

#### **Materials:**

1. Lined paper and pencils
2. Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF)
3. Ingredients of a Mystery Checklist (PDF)
4. Materials for publishing a final book (bordered paper, blank books, etc)

#### **Set Up and Prepare:**

1. Ask for parents willing to type the final copies of the students' mysteries to cut down on the publishing time in class.
2. Copy a class set of the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF) for Part 1.
3. Copy a class set of the Ingredients of a Mystery Checklist (PDF) for Part 3.

#### **Reproducibles:**

- Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF)
- Ingredients of a Mystery Checklist (PDF)

#### **Directions:**

##### **Part 1: The Mystery Planning Sheet**

By this time students have listened to and read many mysteries, so they should be very familiar with the common story elements that appear in the majority of stories that can be categorised as a mystery. Over the next few days, you will be taking students through each step of a mystery planning sheet so that students can map-out their own mystery one step at a time.

##### **Step 1: Choose a Setting**

- a. Read aloud the description of a setting on the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF).
- b. Make a list of settings from mysteries that students have read during this mystery unit or prior to the mystery genre study in class.
- c. Have students choose a setting from the list or one that they have come up with on their own. (Encourage students to personalise their setting by giving it a name if it is a school a town, a store, etc.)

d. Have students record their setting on their Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF) and describe the setting in detail.

e. Ask for volunteers to share their setting with the class. (It is often helpful for students who are having hard time coming up with a setting on their own to hear ideas from their peers.)

### **Step 2: Determine the Problem in the Mystery**

a. Read aloud the section of the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF) that describes the problem component of a mystery.

b. Make a list of problems students have come across in mysteries they have read in class or independently.

c. Have students choose a category for the type of problem they will be including in their own story. Categories include:

- An event that cannot be explained
- A secret
- Something that is lost or missing
- A crime or prank that has been committed

d. Ask students to describe their problem in detail on their Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF).

e. Allow volunteers to share their problem with the class. This often sparks ideas for students who are struggling to determine a problem on their own.

### **Step 3: Create Your Suspects**

a. Read aloud the section of the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF) that explains the rules for creating suspects.

b. Refer back to a short mystery you read aloud in class during lesson one to remind students how authors include multiple suspicious characters in a mystery so that the mystery is not easily solved.

c. Have students revisit the problem they will be developing in their story and think about what type of characters could be created that would have something to do with the problem. (For instance, if a student author decides to write a story about stolen money at a school fair, suspects might include the president of the student council who helped plan the fair, the janitor who locked up the money after the fair was over, or the student who kept talking about how he didn't have enough money to buy a present for his teacher for Christmas).

d. Divide students into groups of three or four. Have each student share the problem they plan to include in their story with the member so their group. Ask group members help each other brainstorm possible suspects for each student's problem. *(I am very careful when creating these groups. I make sure that students who I think might struggle to come up with ideas are grouped with my students who are able to think more deeply about a story and give helpful advice to the struggling writers.)*

e. After students have meet with other students in the class, have them complete the 'Who are Your Suspects' section of the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF). Remind students that they must include both the name of the suspect and why he or she is suspicious. (What would be his or her motive for committing the crime?)

### **Step 4: Decide Who Will Be the Detective**

a. Read aloud the section of the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF) that explains the rules for creating a detective for the mystery.

**b.** Make a list of detectives from mysteries that students have read during this mystery unit or prior to the mystery genre study in class.

**c.** Have students decide the following things:

- Will my detective be an adult or a kid? How old is my detective?
- Will my detective be a boy or a girl?
- Will my detective have a sidekick or a group of friends who help solve the case?
- What name will I give my detective?
- What will my detective look like?
- What type of personality will my detective have?
- Where will my detective live?

**d.** Once students think about the information listed above, have them fill out the 'Who Is Your Detective' section of the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF).

**e.** Ask for volunteers to share their descriptions of the detective/s they plan to create in their story.

**f.** After students have met with other students in the class, have them complete the 'What Are the Clues in Your Story' section of the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF). Remind students some of the clues can lead the reader off track (red herrings), but the author must provide some clues that do help the reader actually solve the crime.

### **Step 5: Plan a Sequence of Events**

**a.** Using a short mystery that you read aloud to the class in Lesson 1 of this unit, work as a class to put the main events in the order they occurred in the story in the 'Sequence of Events' section of a blank copy of the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF).

**b.** Now ask students to brainstorm the main events that will happen in their own mystery by completing the 'Sequence of Events' section on their own Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF). (Remind them that they are not writing the entire story on the planning sheet, they are just giving a brief overview of the main events.)

### **Part 2: Drafting the Mystery**

Once students have completed the plan for their mystery, they will begin writing it in the form of a story. In Lesson 1, students learned about the 'Recipe for a Mystery' includes a clear beginning middle, and end. Take students through the following steps to turn their plan into a complete story.

**Step 1: The Beginning:** In this section, the characters are introduced, and the reader learns the mystery. Encourage students to be very descriptive when describing the main characters. (A lesson about describing a character's appearance can be a separate mini-lesson.)

**Step 2: The Middle:** In this section, detectives work to solve the mystery by interviewing suspects and gathering clues. Have students refer back to their planning sheets to review the sequence of events, the main suspects, and the clues they decided to include in their story.

**Step 3: The End:** In this section, the mystery is solved. Remind students that they should include some evidence in this section to prove who committed the crime.

### **Part 3: Writing Teams**

**Step 1:** Assign students a writing team with whom they will share their story and from whom they will receive feedback. Remind students that being part of a team means that you support your teammates and provide them with help when necessary.

**Step 2:** When in writing teams, each author should get a chance to read aloud his or her story while the others listen.

**Step 3:** After the story is read, the team should use the Ingredients of a Mystery Checklist (PDF) that was introduced in Lesson 1 to make sure the author included all necessary story elements in his or her mystery.

**Step 4:** I also ask members of the team to give one compliment and one suggestion for the author after they finish the checklist.

**Step 5:** After all authors have shared their mysteries, they will make any corrections and improvements to their story that they feel are necessary based on the meeting with their writing team.

**Step 6:** Students should also edit the story for spelling, grammar, and punctuation with the help of the teacher, parent editors, or peer editors.

#### **Part 4: Publishing the Mysteries**

Once students have written their final draft of their story, decide how it will be published. (You may even want to arrange to have parents type the final copies to cut down on the publishing time in class if you want the stories to be word processed.) Choose from the publishing options below or use one of your own.

Have students paste their typed story on the pages inside or write their story by hand on the pages. Encourage students to illustrate the cover and the pages.

- Use old newspapers to cover the front and back covers of a thin notebook. Have students paste their typed story on the pages inside or write their story by hand on the pages. Encourage students to illustrate the pages.
- Purchase thematic stationery from an office supply store or scrapbook shop and print blank lines on the paper. Students can add the story to a writing portfolio or display the stories on a bulletin board for others to read.
- Combine all of the stories into a class book. Send the book home with a different student each night so that parents can read all of the mysteries written by the students in your class. When the book has been sent home with all students, put it in your class library to be enjoyed by all students this year and in years to come.

*\*\* However you plan to publish your story, consider adding an 'About the Author' section to the published story where you include a picture of the author dressed as a detective with a magnifying glass and/or other detective props.*

#### **Supporting All Learners:**

Writing a mystery will probably not be easy for students. It requires a great deal of careful planning and higher level thinking when trying to transform a story plan into an actual mystery. I have established a writing workshop in my classroom. This format allows for independent writing time every day. It is during this time that I conference with my writers both individually and in small groups. As I discover the strengths and weaknesses of my writers, I plan focus groups to address common obstacles students are facing in their writing. Students can sign up for a conference, but I make sure that I conduct individual conferences with my students who need additional support on a regular basis.

#### **Lesson Extension:**

##### **Optional Culminating Activity:**

Invite parents to come to school for a special 'Meet the Detectives' event. Students dress up as their favourite detective (or a generic detective) and read the mystery they have written to their parents or other parents who visit. Arrange desks in a circle, and have students sit behind their desks and autograph detective pictures for the visitors. (Take pictures of each student with a detective hat, trench coat, and magnifying glass. Print a set of wallet-size copies for students to autograph for their 'fans'. This activity can also be done without parents in attendance.

**Assess Students:**

The main piece that I use for assessment is the student's published mystery. I create a rubric that I share with the students before they begin their story to let them know what I expect. Our district also has a 6-point scoring rubric that I use to assess the 6 Traits of Writing. However, you may choose to create a rubric more specific to the mystery genre.

**Home Connection:**

As I explained in the optional lesson extension, parents are invited into the classroom after all mysteries have been published to listen to the stories and 'meet the detectives'. If you do not invite parents into the classroom, students can still take their published pieces home to share with their parents.

**Evaluate the Lesson:**

- Do I need to provide additional modelling for my students when walking them through the Planning a Mystery Worksheet (PDF)?
- Do I need to provide additional support for specific students?
- Is this lesson too challenging for my class? If so, should we work together to write a class mystery instead?

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