Using a Mystery Novel to Encourage Pleasure Reading and Imaginative Thinking

Guide for Curriculum Unit 07.02.02, published September 2007
by Cathy Kinzler

This unit is designed to promote reading for pleasure and the use of higher order thinking skills in middle school reluctant readers, particularly seventh and eighth graders. I use one mystery novel, *Blood Trail* by Nancy Springer, but the activities could be adapted for other literature. The mystery genre is a great choice for engaging students who do not enjoy reading because it capitalizes on the current popularity of television programs dealing with crime solving. Mysteries provide a perfect opportunity to grab students' attention. Trying to solve the "whodunit?" can pull them into the print world of the characters' emotions and quandaries, making them experience questions like "Shall I 'snitch' on a friend?" This novel is excellent for my purposes because it is short and written at about a fifth-sixth grade level, allowing students to become personally involved in a story involving the murder of a high school boy by his twin brother and the ethical situations surrounding it. Activities include using oral language skills and graphic organizers, writing expository and persuasive narratives, working with elements of a story, summarizing, predicting, and higher order thinking skills such as inferential and imaginative thinking. An extensive list of mystery novels is included.

(Developed for English, grade 7; recommended for Reading and English Language Arts, grades 7-8)