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Using a Mystery Novel to Encourage Pleasure Reading and Imaginative Thinking

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Rationale

I am a library media specialist in an urban middle school with a large number of students on free and reduced lunches. I will be teaching this unit to seventh grade students who almost exclusively read just a little below grade level, but do not usually retain much of what they read, nor do they appear to enjoy reading. In fact, they frequently express active dislike for reading. This unit would also be appropriate for eighth or ninth grade students who fit the preceding description and who also could benefit from instruction and practice in higher order thinking skills. Because I do not teach these students full time, I decided to teach the skills and objectives using one high interest mystery novel. The teaching will take place in the media center.

These students are from lower socioeconomic environments where reading is not valued and where they do not have many forms of reading material in their homes. They have not usually been read to as children and seldom see their parents read. These attitudes and values have been passed on to my students, most of whom have rarely completed an entire book and would not choose to do so if left to their own devices. Their chosen means of entertainment is generally viewing movies or programs on television channels such as HBO and Showtime, listening to rap music or playing video games.

Within these broad generalizations, of course, the students are not all alike. Their reading levels, interests and modes of learning vary. Some are visual, some are auditory, some have Individualized Learning Plans (Exceptional Education Students) or need special accommodations of some type, while others just do not enjoy coming to school and sitting still for traditional education. Some appear compliant, yet are tuned out. However, there are still those who want to learn and are open to new experiences. In designing my unit, I planned activities to appeal to a variety of learning styles and to provide for differentiation of instruction.

One complaint I hear frequently from the teachers in my school and in education literature is the inability of students to think creatively, make inferences, and reason logically. Norton Tener gave the results of a Boston College study for the National Science Foundation which found that currently required standardized tests did indeed require teachers to teach more rote memorization and lower level thinking skills at the expense of learning to apply knowledge (1). This is exactly what teachers are saying. Students are missing a crucial component of what they need to be effective life long learners. I also believe that these skills are essential for citizens in a democracy.

Each year we worry that our students will not pass our state mandated tests (Standards of Learning or SOL). I believe, and most research proves, that the more students read, the better they become at using the reading skills they need to do well on all content area tests and to function well in the real world. Vocabulary, fluency, conceptualization, and comprehension all improve with pleasure reading.

Mystery stories and novels are a perfect vehicle for encouraging students to read for pleasure and also to practice second order thinking skills. Although they do watch television shows such as the *CSI* series and *Law and Order*, few of my students have developed an interest in reading mysteries. I believe this is because they have not been exposed to how interesting and stimulating it can be to enter into the print world where information is not so instantaneous. A crime is committed in slower time, and gives students a chance to enter the print world on their own terms but without feeling rushed or bullied. Still, this exercise does require imaginative thinking, and unfortunately today's students are more used to being entertained visually, with no imagination or effort required. I will use a mystery novel as a hook to get my students engaged in an engrossing plot involving a young person who is faced with a life altering event that the students will find relevant to their lives. This should serve to get them motivated to read the book in order to find out what choices the protagonist makes. I have designed activities to help them begin to use second order thinking skills that will place them in the minds of the novel's characters and that also relate to decisions my students make daily.

This is also a good opportunity to teach and reinforce the elements of a story. Mysteries provide excellent examples of conflict as well as the other elements, and I will provide a graphic organizer that we will complete as we read. Applying knowledge of the elements of a book is using a higher order thinking skill and should result in better retention of this required knowledge. In my experience, students have generally had difficulty with recognition of story elements. I will teach these elements with the intention of increasing their comprehension and understanding of all literature .

I also hope to capitalize on the interest that I think will be generated by the release of the new Nancy Drew movie. While I am not sure that many of my inner city students will actually go see the movie, I believe the publicity alone will raise some curiosity about mysteries and crime solving. I have ordered several copies of the book based on the screenplay as well as some of the older Nancy Drew books for my school media center that may encourage more mystery reading.

Research

As I searched the current literature for studies relating to students' reading habits and the teaching of reading, I found many references to studies by Louise Rosenblatt and Margaret Early. Their work continues to impact today's instruction and contemporary theories.

For a long time, teachers taught literature by giving meaning to the text itself; there was a specific interpretation that teachers assisted students in finding (Asselin 62). However, current thinking is that we should encourage students to make their own meaning. Rosenblatt, as quoted in Asselin, offers two key features of a theory on how readers create meaning which are accepted today (62).

One feature of Rosenblatt's theory is that literature is a way to promote critical thinking and awareness of the

variety of perspectives. She feels that readers bring their own experiences, emotions, and knowledge to their reading, triggering associations with the words, images, and thoughts expressed in the text. She advocates that experiencing literature this way will help promote the open-mindedness that is so important to a democratic form of government (Asselin 62). My unit will have students respond on a personal level to events in a mystery novel, thus bringing their experiences and ideas to derive their own meaning from fictional events. They will be viewing those things from different perspectives, using thought processes they seldom have been required to use. They will also be using higher order thinking skills, such as analysis, and drawing parallels to their own lives. Each student will have the opportunity to have his or her own views heard and respected as they respond to literature in a manner that will be new to many.

This approach is important to my students because of the emphasis that has been placed on simple recall of facts owing to the preoccupation with standardized testing and scores that affects whether schools make Adequate Yearly Progress under the No Child Left Behind Act. Schools in urban and lower socioeconomic areas feel the highest amount of pressure. Those students whose needs are the greatest are the ones whose higher order thinking skills are most often overlooked. This is what I have seen happen in my school, and this is why I have chosen to cultivate higher order thinking skills in this unit.

Rosenblatt's other point is that readers read texts either for instructional purposes or for aesthetic purposes. Aesthetic responses are those that put the reader in the world of what he is reading. Most reading falls somewhere along a continuum of each type of response. In the Asselin article, Probst describes aesthetic reading as a kind that presents endless opportunities because even though the intention of the text is finite, the responses of the readers are definitely not, especially in the case of middle school students whose moods can change from day to day, allowing even more possibilities for interpretation. He says aesthetic reading "acknowledges the uniqueness of the reader"(128).

I find that my students lack empathy. This is true of most adolescents, who tend to be self-focused. Situations that usually would draw a sympathetic response from adults seem not to cause a reaction from my students. Perhaps they have become numb to tragedies and crime because it is not an unusual occurrence to them or because of the violence of video games, movies, music videos and television, or a combination of factors.

A sense of ethics is another attribute that my students seem to be lacking. When a fight happens in school, the children run to it, not away. If something is stolen, or a fire set in a trash can, it is nearly impossible to get them to recognize the seriousness of the offense and to name the guilty party. Most feel no responsibility when losing school library books because they cannot see the relevance of the "rightness" or "wrongness" of the act and the effect it has on fellow students in our school community.

My activities for this unit will help the students develop the imaginative second order thinking to put themselves in the lives of characters who are going through some very emotional and tragic events that sometimes seem to have no clear right or wrong answers, and that lack of clarity should generate lively discussions. I want my students to have to wrestle with those issues by using some deep thinking, guided by activities that will require them to think sometimes creatively, other times rationally, and not to react with their pre-programmed responses. I think each student will bring an interesting perspective to discussions based on his/her own experiences that will enrich the entire class. I will challenge their beliefs and force them to examine situational ethics, and the effects of violence on the people on its periphery.

Margaret Early writes of stages of literary appreciation. She claims that literature is a complex art, so much so that it is not possible to define students' growth precisely into stages. She mentions that maturity, intellectual ability, and reading ability affect literary appreciation, which she also refers to as "the development of delight

in literature"(162).

Her first stage of literary appreciation is where I find most of my students: *Unconscious Enjoyment*. The term "enjoyment" is used loosely. The "delight" Early refers to has to come with no effort, the readers must find any pleasure they get from reading very easily, and the story must meet their likes although they cannot articulate the reasons why they like a story. Frequently they respond to character stereotypes because any deviation might interfere with the action and/or confuse the reader. Early goes on to write that this stage of appreciation can be possible for those who have little or no reading ability.

The second stage of literary appreciation is self-conscious appreciation, and at this stage readers are now willing to put forth more effort to further their enjoyment. At this stage readers no longer just find delight alone, but might also want to know "why." They want character development involving plausible motives and perhaps psychological conflict, not just physical conflict. Early states that readers cannot bypass the first stage of unconscious enjoyment, but have to be persuaded that literature will provide enough pleasure to make them willing to work to reach the next level. She believes that some readers never reach the next level because they lack the intellectual ability, while others choose not to do so. She also believes that teachers play a role in how and when they present literature appreciation to students. Teachers need to wait until students are ready. They must encourage the development of independent appreciation rather than have students fall into the habit of copying the teachers' taste.

Early's third stage, conscious delight, is the highest stage of literary appreciation, and the one toward which teachers endeavor to guide all students with the capacity to reach it. At this stage, the reader has the ability to deepen his/her own literary appreciation without teacher assistance. She states that this stage is more likely to be found among mature adults than high school or even university students, thus this stage has little application to my students.

The description of these stages corresponds to my own experiences as a library media specialist and my observation of my middle school students. To my utter frustration, most do not like to read. They tell me straight out and in no uncertain terms, "I don't like to read! Why should I get a book?" When my sixth grade students come to the middle school, for the first three months they ask me for series of books that they read at the second grade reading level, books they can read at the "no effort" stage, as previously defined. At the beginning of each school year, teachers bring their students to the library to check out a book, and some students do not bring the book back until May. Even then they will tell me they have not read it. I know that my students have not been convinced that reading is worth the effort that is needed for the enjoyment felt at Early's second stage of literary appreciation.

I am using the mystery genre, as exemplified by the specific novel I chose, as a hook to get them personally involved. The story is easy enough to read and will not slow them down. It has a fascinating and pertinent conflict that will retain their interest. The characters' dilemmas will catch their attention because they themselves may have dealt with issues such as loyalty to friends, "snitching," acts of violence, and the loss of a special friend. My intention is that the novel and activities in this unit will help my students be ready to move into the stage of self-conscious appreciation and assist them in building a desire to do so. We will look at complex and relevant issues surrounding loyalty to one's friends and family as it personally relates to their own lives, and whether it is okay to "tell" to save a friend's life. Unfortunately, some of my students may one day face a similar situation.

My school is on a block schedule with each class meeting for ninety minutes every other day, and I will be teaching this unit for a period of approximately four weeks. The mystery novel I chose to use is *Blood Trail* by

Nancy Springer. It will be a perfect vehicle for students to easily read and enjoy in the time allotted, and to teach the second order thinking skills that are crucial for all children—but especially urban and lower socioeconomic students—to have.

Strategies

The novel I selected to use is *Blood Trail* by Nancy Springer. There were several features I was looking for when I chose this novel. Because I wanted to focus on encouraging students to enjoy and understand the mystery genre, teaching them about the elements of a story, and increasing their desire to read for pleasure, I wanted a novel that would be fairly short and easy for them to read. *Blood Trail* in hard cover is one hundred and five pages with eleven short chapters. It is written on about a fifth or sixth grade reading level. This means the students will not be overwhelmed by length or difficulty as they read, and I will be more able to easily teach my objectives. After his best friend Aaron is murdered, seventeen-year-old Jeremy, nicknamed "Booger," becomes aware that he is the only person who has any idea who might be guilty of the crime. Aaron has mentioned his fear of his twin brother Nathan, but Jeremy cannot bear to think that Nathan might be guilty and he is reluctant to tell anyone of that revealing comment for many reasons.

Teachers should be aware that in response to the emotional situations of the book the protagonist uses the following words that are appropriate in his predicament: *Damn, hell, bitch*, *ass, shit*, and *bastard*. They suit the character's age and personality and students are certainly used to hearing them, but in some environments they might cause a problem. I will tell the students they will be in the book and appropriate to the story, but not acceptable for use in conversation in school. This presents an opportunity to discuss the use of language in literature as a vehicle for providing atmosphere and authenticity. Such words, one can say, are never used in polite conversation with adults or in a school or social situation, but only when emotions and stress are strong in a situation that is out of the protagonist's ability to handle on a rational level.

The story is very engaging to seventh graders because it is about students getting ready to enter their senior year in high school, and the murder that occurs is gory enough to appeal to their age group. The victim is stabbed over seventy times in the neck. It is also well written, having been selected as a Best Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers in the past. Nancy Springer has also just begun a new detective series, Enola Holmes, about the purported younger sister of Sherlock who solves mysteries, and I can refer students to this series as another example of the genre by the same author.

The first thing I will do to introduce the novel is give the students an Anticipatory Guide that I developed based on the themes of *Blood Trail*. I will distribute the Guide below, reading the statements aloud so that no one is slowed by reading ability. They will have about two or three minutes to respond. The idea is to have them respond instinctively to these themes and not think too deeply at this point, but just bring the issues to the forefront of their minds. I will collect these when they are finished, and return them after completing the book, at which time I will guide a discussion. If any discussion does occur when they respond to the Guide, my preference will be to keep it to a minimum. My purpose here is to provoke an interest in the concepts emphasized in the book. When the Guides are returned upon completion of the unit, I will be interested to hear justifications as to how and why opinions have or have not changed after our reading and activities.

Blood Trail

Agree Disagree

Snitching is always wrong.

It's okay to lie to keep out of trouble.

You should lie to protect your friends.

You can count on your family to stand by you, no matter what.

Your neighbors will "have your back" if you are in trouble.

The police can solve most crimes.

Murderers should automatically get the death penalty.

Being jealous makes people do bad things.

As long as you are not caught, it is okay to commit a crime.

You don't need to worry about anyone except the victim of a crime.

Activity One: Your Number One Buddy

I have several objectives for the next activity. The first is to get the students to think more in depth about a major theme of the book, one that is relevant to the world of most urban youth today, "snitching." Second, they will write an organized narrative about a friend in order to begin a discussion about snitching. They will be using an analysis of those narratives in their discussions, beginning the use of second order thinking that I am working towards developing, and they will be talking about ethics in situational terms. Third, they will be practicing oral communication of their ideas in an organized manner while using vocabulary appropriate to their audience (their classmates), the topic and the purpose of our discussion. My last objective is to stir up interest in the book they will be reading by making a personal connection to their lives so that they will have more of a vested interest in reading it.

After collecting the Anticipation Guides, I will begin discussing friendship with the students. I will ask them questions such as:

What makes a good friend? Is it loyalty, sense of humor, trustworthiness?

What makes them want to be friends with someone?

What makes them not want to be friends with a person?

Have they ever lost a friend? How did they feel about that?

Have you ever had a friend whose personality changed? What happened to your friendship? How did you feel about that?

After we talk about some of these questions and the students have shown some interest in the topic, I will give each child a sheet of paper with a graphic organizer on the bottom and the following things to write about at the top:

"Think about your best friend. Describe him or her in detail. Tell what he or she looks like so that we would recognize him or her if we saw them outside of school. Write about what makes your friend so special to you. What qualities does your friend have that makes you care about him or her? Share a special experience you have had with that friend. What does it mean to have his/her "back"?"

The reason why I will give each student his or her own copy is so that everyone can look at each question and think about each part and check it off or cross it out as it is answered. As a part of best practices in writing, I plan to have them brainstorm and web the answers on the sheet I give them before writing their narratives on their own paper. There are many graphic organizers that can be found at http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=2981 that would be suitable for organizing their thoughts before writing.

While they are writing, I will be playing the song "Umbrella" sung by Rihanna in the background. It is a popular song by a singer they are familiar with and enjoy listening to. The lyrics are about friendship and being loyal when times are good and bad. The lyrics can be found at several websites including *http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/ rihanna/umbrella.html* and *http://www.lyricstop.com/u/ umbrella-rihannafjay-z.html*

After the writing activity I will ask for volunteers to share their writing. As they read, I will point out with praise the parts of the descriptions they included, to help them grasp more fully the types of descriptions I had asked for. If someone is missing an entire portion—for example, they have left out the special quality about his/her friend—I might say, "Nice job! Now what can you tell us about what makes John so special to you?" This would be a prompt to pull out that which was forgotten and give the student an opportunity to think about it, add it and be better prepared for the discussion to follow. I want to be sure that each student has a well thought out narrative from the beginning in order to have a richer discussion.

In order to ensure an orderly and respectful discussion, I will have to be sure the students understand some group norms. I will ask them what guidelines they think we need to follow to be sure each person who wants to speak has a chance to have a turn and to be heard. As I steer the formation of these guidelines, I will be sure they include common courtesies such as listen respectfully (and probably I will have to explain what that means, i.e., no rude noises if you disagree, etc.), wait your turn to speak, speak loudly enough to be heard. One new behavior management tool I am going to introduce them to is a small stuffed animal that will be "speaker control." I will give it to the first speaker, and each speaker thereafter will hand it to the next speaker. Only the student holding the animal is allowed to speak. They may raise their hands to have a chance to get the animal. It will require some practice and consistency on my part to enforce this, but I believe it will result in a more effective discussion.

When I am satisfied that each student is prepared for the discussion by having produced a thorough narrative about his/her best friend, I will begin a discussion that will raise one theme of *Blood Trail* at a time. I will ask the students the following question:

"If your best friend did something wrong such as painting graffiti on a building, and the owner was trying to find out who did it, would you snitch? Why or why not? You must give a reason for your answer beyond he/she is my friend."

I am looking to have them discuss the degree of "wrongness" of graffiti painting in terms of situational ethics, as well as the issue of snitching. I might have to prod with questions such as "Are you considering that it is damage to property?" or "What difference would it make to you if the police were looking for your friend?"

After about fifteen minutes, depending on how the discussion is going, I plan to increase the seriousness of the question by asking "If your best friend was driving drunk and hurt someone badly and drove off without stopping, would you tell? Why or why not? Give a reason for your answer."

Again I will be looking for them to discuss the degree of "wrongness," to see if anyone brings up the idea of a human victim, probable police involvement, and jail as a punishment. My students rarely, if ever, admit that snitching is okay, so I am pretty sure that few will think they should turn in their best friend. This is an example of where they lack the empathy to relate to the victim of the hit and run. This type of discussion involves second order thinking skills since they will be required to look at more than one side of an issue and back their assertions with reasons.

Once they have insisted that snitching is not the right thing for them to do, as I feel reasonably sure they will do, I will ask the following:

"Let's suppose you heard that someone had a knife and was going to jump your best friend. In that case, would you tell someone?"

The discussion will begin again with our animal as our peacekeeper. I am anticipating that this will be a lively discussion with some students saying they would fight with their friend rather than tell while others might admit that this was a dangerous situation and might pick a trusted adult to tell. However, as I have previously stated, these children are so numb to violence that they might not relate to the true danger of the situation. That is why I am hoping the activities focusing on imaginative thinking will help them "feel" the impact the violent crime in *Blood Trail* has on the family and friends of the victim and that it will make a dent in their lack of sensitivity and help develop empathy.

Next I will hold up *Blood Trail* and let them look at the title and cover. I will ask them to think about the title, cover illustrations, and our previous activities and discussions, then predict what they think the book will be about. I will record these predictions on the whiteboard, and we will talk about them after we have read several chapters.

I will next explain that the book is a mystery, and explain the characteristics of the genre. Mystery is a kind of fiction that has all the elements of fiction but some additional features and terms with which students will need to be familiar. (See Appendix A for these terms.) I will put them on poster board since I have no bulletin boards. Students will also have a copy of the list in their notebooks, and I will ask them to note the pages of the book on which for the first time we come across examples of a mystery's characteristic features, and to give the terms for them.

I will also review here the elements of a story: characters, setting, plot, conflict, and theme. Students will receive a graphic organizer such as the one found at *http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/schools/sligoms/Summer/Summer%20Rdg%20Organizer%20&%20story%20 elements.pdf* to keep in their notebooks and we will fill them in together. We will also have a large version posted in the media center.

The students will be practicing the second order thinking skill of predicting (or hypothesizing) as they read *Blood Trail*. Since the chapters are numbered, but not titled by the author, students will also be summarizing

each by giving it a brief name that represents the main idea. I will be giving them a prediction chart (brief sample below) that will ask for these items.

Chapter Number & Your Title | Your Prediction | What actually happened

The chapters in *Blood Trail* are very short, ranging from five and one half pages to eleven and one half pages, so I plan to read more than one on some of our class days, depending on the activities for that day. I will read the first chapter aloud because the first few pages tell about the two boys—the victim, Aaron, and his best friend, the protagonist, Jeremy, nicknamed Booger—swimming in a lake and having a fun time with a crawdad, something with which my students are totally unfamiliar, and which in itself would not grab their attention. On page three, however, Aaron admits to being scared of his twin brother. This will grab their attention and is a good place to stop for a discussion of why they think he is afraid of his brother, and whether they have ever been afraid of a sibling. What is the worst thing that might happen?

At this point we can fill in parts of our graphic organizer on setting, character, and conflict. We will also work on some of our mystery terms in our notebook. These activities will be ongoing throughout the novel.

Activity Two: Noting the Crime Scene

Chapter Two describes what happens at the Gingrich home when the detectives and coroners go in to analyze the crime scene. This is a perfect opportunity to capitalize on students' interest in forensic science television programs and get them to practice their powers of observation and note-taking skills. They will use a form of graphic organizer and then write an expository report. They will also be using oral communication skills.

I will set up five crime scenes in the media center and divide the students into groups of five. These crime scenes will consist of patches of carpet (donated by carpet stores) of about five feet by five feet. They will have a variety of normal, everyday articles on them, and a paper cut out representing a body. Articles that might be on the rug would be soda cans, small pieces of rope, pencils, pens, a t-shirt, a paper cup, a notebook, newspaper or magazine, a tube of hand cream, a hairbrush, etc. I will leave nothing that would be a weapon. Each patch would display different items, but all would have the body cut out.

Each group will receive a paper square representation graphic organizer to represent the "room." They will be instructed to draw the room with each item as it is on the carpet in relation to each other. I will ask them to use symbols to represent each item and to indicate on a legend what each symbol represents with a full physical description. I will show them the crime scene sketch at *http://www.sccja.org/images/csr-crimescene8.jpg* as an example. They will have twenty minutes to complete these graphic organizers, transforming the visual into words. They will then take the notes they have written and transfer these into a narrative report of what was located at the "crime scene." Each group will then have five minutes to make an oral report to the rest of the class about what they discovered.

Activity Three: What's the Sentence?

For this activity, I want the students to think about degrees of guilt as well as extenuating and mitigating circumstances. They should begin to read carefully for clues that the author provides directly and to infer from the text clues that might not be as obvious.

When we reach page twenty-two in Chapter three, I will read aloud the following remark spoken by Jeremy:

"I wasn't going to snitch on Nathan because he couldn't have done it. I mean I'd known him as long as I'd known Aaron."

I will ask the class if Jeremy really is saying Nathan couldn't have done it or that he just does not want to believe Nathan could have done it. I will ask them to list some reasons why Jeremy has trouble believing Nathan murdered Aaron.

Then I will tell the class that from now on we will be reading to look for clues, and that we will spend some time in groups of two going back to the beginning to look for clues that Nancy Springer gave us as to who might have murdered Aaron.

I will need to clarify for them here specifically the type of clue I want them to find because there are many foreshadowing clues that something awful is going to happen. For example, when Aaron says, on page three, "I'm scared, Booger," he is giving the reader a clue that something bad is going to happen, which is a foreshadowing clue. I want my students to only look for clues that give an idea of who the guilty party might be. An example of that is on page four where Aaron says specifically that he is afraid of Nathan.

They should write the clues down in their notebooks, with the page on which they located it. We will spend about ten minutes searching and I will set a timer. After the timer goes off, I will ask them to discuss the clues they found, and I will write them on the board so that I can be sure that each student has all the clues in writing. I will also talk with them about those which are more obvious and the ones that become obvious after more information has been revealed. One example is in the first chapter, when "Aardy" panics and runs home when Jeremy cannot reach Aaron by phone; after the murder, it becomes apparent that something is not right in the Gingrich home, but the reader overlooks that at first reading. This is because it does not seem important until after Aaron has been murdered, and this is a mystery trait that I would point out to the students.

There are only a few clues before page twenty-two. I would expect the students to find that 1) Aaron is afraid of Nathan (page four), 2) Aardy's rush to go home when Jeremy cannot reach Aaron on the phone is an indication that something is wrong in that household (page nine), and also on page nine 3) to recognize Nathan's weird behavior when he answers the phone and tells Jeremy that Aaron is not home at a time when Jeremy knows he is, and 4) to be alert on page fourteen when Jeremy wonders about the dark stains on Nathan's T-shirt.

I will point out to the students, who may have missed the second clue entirely, that it is an inferential clue. This calls for second order thinking that they are not accustomed to using, and that I want them to become aware of. The fact that Nathan and Aaron's younger sister panics when Jeremy cannot reach Aaron by phone is not an obvious clue that Nathan has committed the murder we now know about, but it does tell us she is

aware that things are not as they should be in her home.

I will instruct them that from now on, as they read, they should be alert for clues, both obvious and inferential (not so obvious), and write them down along with the page number every time they find one. The rest of the clues can be found in Appendix B.

Aaron's funeral occurs in Chapter Eight. When the minister asks the congregation to pray for justice, I will have a student look up the definition of justice and we will talk about "the administering of deserved punishment." I will ask the class if they have ever heard the expression "The punishment should fit the crime?" We will discuss that for about five minutes, considering whether such a punishment would be "just."

At the book's end, Nathan has been arrested, but not tried. I will tell the students to go over all the evidence and clues they have listed in their notebooks. The author has provided many clues to convince the reader that Nathan is guilty.

I am going to ask them to think about his motives, what they know about the family, especially Aaron and Nathan's relationship, and what a just punishment would be. Then I will ask them to think about what questions they would have about a trial and how sentencing is determined, and to write them down. I am going to invite a juvenile or municipal court judge or an attorney specializing in criminal or juvenile cases to speak to the class. I will provide the speaker with an outline of our book, and pre-screened questions from the students to make sure we get the most relevant ones, with no repetition. I will also add some questions if I think crucial information I want them to have is missing.

After our speaker's visit, we will have our final writing exercise aimed at developing empathy and imaginative thinking. I will give them a choice of two persuasive letters to write to allow for choice based on gender.

1. Assuming Nathan has been convicted, if you are Mrs. Gingrich, mother to Aaron and Nathan, write a letter to the sentencing judge explaining why you think Nathan murdered his brother, the effect the entire situation has had on your family, what you think a "just" sentence would be for Nathan, a sentence that would be appropriate for him, but would also satisfy the family. Explain why you think so.
2. Assuming Nathan has been convicted, if you are Nathan, write a letter to the sentencing judge explaining why you murdered your brother, how you felt about it, the effects it had on you and your family, what you think a "just" sentence would be for you considering the effects your actions had on your family. Explain why you think so.

I will explain the range of punishments Nathan might receive, and ask them why they think that range exists. We will compare the responses written from the mother's perspective with those written from Nathan's. In a class discussion, I will have the students analyze whether they think some of the responses from Nathan's perspective show he is acting from self-interest or if some responses demonstrate understanding of the seriousness of his actions and how they impacted his family. This should provide a rich discussion that will allow students to reveal how they have grown in empathy and the ability to enter into a character's role in a novel.

Concluding Activity: Back to the Beginning

After finishing all our activities, I will return the Anticipation Guides that students completed before reading the novel. I will read each statement aloud, and ask if any students have changed their minds or have become less definite in their assumptions. Discussing these statements in the context of the novel they have completed will give the students a framework for a deeper, more personally relevant dialogue than if they were to discuss them in the abstract.

I would expect that some of the students will maintain some of their viewpoints as expressed in the Anticipation Guides, such as "Snitching is always wrong." It has been a part of their neighborhood culture for so long that this one unit may not provide enough experiences to have them feel comfortable expressing a different opinion, even if some small change in their feelings has occurred. The issue of lying for different purposes should provide a lively discussion. Was Jeremy right or wrong to omit telling the police that Aaron was afraid of Nathan? Is omission of a fact considered a lie? Why did he do it? Was Jeremy trying to protect a friend as in the Anticipation Guide, or were there deeper feelings involved?

This is another opportunity to use oral communication skills and to have a rational discussion, making use of second order thinking skills based on learning experiences from our unit.

I will provide students with a list of mysteries in our library that they might enjoy reading as well as others they could obtain from the public library or bookstores. Some of these mysteries are in the resource list.

Appendix A: Mystery Terms

Alibi- an excuse that an accused person uses to try to show that he or she was somewhere else, and not at the scene of the crime

Breakthrough- a discovery that helps to solve a crime

Clue- a fact, object or thing that helps to solve a mystery

Crime- an act committed in violation of the law, more serious than a misdemeanor.]

Deduce- to reach a conclusion by logical reasoning (infer)

Detective- a person, usually a member of a police force, who investigates crimes and obtains evidence or information. Also: a person who investigates crimes and gathers information, as in "private detective"

Evidence- something such as a witness statement or object that is used as proof in a crime in a court of law

Extenuating Circumstances- things that make somebody's actions excusable or less blameworthy

Hunch- a guess or feeling not based on known facts

Mitigating Circumstances- relevant facts that are not excuses, but may be considered as reasons for reducing the penalties or punishment given

Motive- an inner drive or reason that causes a person to do something or act in a certain way

Mystery- a work of fiction, drama or film that deals with a puzzling crime

Polygraph- An instrument that simultaneously records changes in physiological processes such as heartbeat, blood pressure, and respiration, often used as a lie detector.

Red herring- in mystery fiction, a trick that leads investigators or readers towards an incorrect solution.

Sleuth- another name for a detective

Suspect- One who is suspected of having committed a crime.

Victim- someone who is harmed, suffers some loss, or who is tricked, swindled, or taken advantage of

Witness- someone who can give a firsthand account of something seen, heard, or experienced

Appendix B: Clues Found After Page 22

Pp. 25-26. ". . .and the worst of it was, like Mom said, he was out there somewhere, and I didn't know where, and yeah, I was scared."

P. 30. "Pinto River had beefed up police patrols. . ." This is an example of an inferential clue, that students may miss until pointed out several times.

P. 31. "Didn't want to go to bed till I was sure I'd be out like a light, not lying there with Aaron on my mind and wondering if maybe I was next."

P. 32. ". . .got to be a psycho who came in from the interstate or something."

P. 33. ". . ."Aaron was strong as a Mack truck, and Nathan was smaller. Is, I mean. He weighs less. Why would Aaron let him—"

P. 55. "It's not the first time they had him in for questioning."

"Nathan's the chief suspect, I think. They questioned him before."

"It's some kind of weird coincidence. A mistake. Somebody told Aaron a lie or something."

"When they searched the house, they found some very graphic images of violence in his room. Printed off the Internet, maybe."

P. 56. "The murder weapon? Yes. A bayonet. Thrown into the sump hole in the basement."

Pp. 56-57. "There was an editorial about how Nathan had no criminal record and no history of mental illness and did okay in school and distinguished himself on the debate team and belonged to a nice middle-class churchgoing family, the point being that kids like me who slept in on Sunday morning looked more like a murderer than Nathan did, I guess."

P. 57. " He said Aaron had put his bike away, then he'd no sooner walked in the door from the garage than he had come up against the killer with the knife. Then, according to the blood trail, Aaron had run to the front door, where he got stabbed some more trying to get out, and then he'd headed toward his room but he didn't make it, and then. . .I couldn't read about it anymore."

Appendix C: Implementing District Standards

While teaching this unit, teachers will be incorporating some of Virginia's Standards of Learning Objectives in English for Grades Seven and Eight.

7.1 (Oral Language) Students will give and seek information in conversations, in group discussions, and in oral presentations, especially using vocabulary and style appropriate for listeners, and asking probing questions to seek elaboration and clarification of ideas.

7.5 (Reading) Students will read a variety of forms of literature and deal with the elements of literature, making inferences and summarizing.

8.5 (Reading) also intends for students to be able to describe inferred main ideas or themes using evidence from the text as support, and to describe how authors create meaning using characters, conflict, point of view and tone.

7.8 (Writing) Students will develop narrative, expository, and persuasive writing.

8.7. (Writing) Students will write in a variety of forms, including narrative, expository, persuasive, and informational.

Annotated Bibliography

Resources for Teachers

Websites

http://www.cobblestonepub.com/resources/ ody0401t.html?x=17.411906242371094567001134589708

If you have access to the January 2004 *Odyssey* magazine, published by Carus Publishing that deals with crime scene science, this teacher's guide will be a helpful tool.

http://www.geocities.com/logic_puzzler

This site breaks detective work into the processes of logical reasoning used in solving a mystery. It provides dozens of puzzles to solve by level of difficulty (one to five stars). There is a shareware download of Mystery Master that allows you to create and solve logic puzzles.

http://kids.mysterynet.com/

This site has several mysteries for students to solve with solutions and reasoning.

http://library.thinkquest.org/J002344/

This website provides facts from the early years of mystery to the year 2000. It shows how the mystery was formed, what should go into a mystery, and who wrote the first. It includes games.

http://www.readwritethink.org/ lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=796

Authored by the International Reading Association, this lesson plan allows your students to examine story elements and vocabulary associated with mystery stories. A myriad of other activities and links to other mystery sites are included.

http://science.howstuffworks.com/csi2.htm

This site gives a detailed description of how crime scene technicians work a crime scene complete with diagrams and photographs. It compares the *CSI* television show to real life investigations.

Other Resources

Asselin, Marlene. "Reader Response in Literature and Reading Instruction." Teacher Librarian 04/2000. Gale Group. http://find.galegroup.com>.

This article discusses Rosenblatt's theory of how readers make meaning from reading, the development of the concept of reader response, and looks at some practices that developed from the theory.

Beers, K., & Samuels, B. G. (Eds.). (1998). *Into Focus: Understanding and Creating Middle School Readers*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.

This is a comprehensive handbook that focuses on all aspects of the middle school reader and is a wonderful resource. *Section II: A Focus on Response* was especially helpful in researching for this unit.

Carlsen, G. Robert. "Literature IS." English Journal 63(1974): 23-27.

The article discusses five different types of rewards readers find in literature and in the act of reading. These include satisfactions in losing oneself in imaginary adventures and worlds, as well as the enjoyment of the literature itself.

Early, Margaret. "Stages of Growth in Literary Appreciation." The English Journal 03/1960: 161-167. Orbis. JSTOR. Yale University. 29/06/2007 http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0013- 8274%28195609%2945%3A6%3C303%ALAGU%E2.0.CO%3B2-0>.

A fascinating examination of three stages of literary appreciation and the role of the teacher at each stage.

Farrell, Tish. Write Your Own Mystery Story. Minneapolis: Compass Point, 2006.

If you want to expand the unit and introduce writing mysteries, this book is a great help. It takes students through the entire writing

process, providing scenarios for writing, using classic and contemporary mystery authors, books, and characters.

Kilby, Janice . The Master Detective Handbook: Help Our Detectives Use Gadgets & Super Sleuthing Skills to Solve the Mystery & Catch the Crooks. 1st. Lark Books, 2006.

Middle school detectives, Ellen "Pink" Pinkerton, Sherman Homes, and Mike Hu, along with Ellen's dog Sam Spayed, solve a mystery, while giving clues directly to the reader. Evidence is collected and forensic activities suggested. The crime solving is taken seriously, but the language is humorous. This is a great resource for getting the entire class involved in the science of crime investigation.

Sobol, Donald. Two-Minute Mysteries. New York: Scholastic, Inc, 1967.

This is an excellent resource for students to read or for teachers to read aloud to their students to see if they can solve the seventy-nine very brief mysteries in this book. Solutions are given upside down at the end of each. It is great practice for listening or reading for clues to solve mysteries.

Springer, Nancy. Blood Trail. New York: Holiday House, 2003.

Springer, Nancy, Blood Trail. Paperback Edition. New York: Holiday House, 2007.

Sukach, Jim. Crime Scene Whodunits: Dr. Quicksolve Mini-Mysteries. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2003.

As with the Sobol book, short mysteries are provided for students to solve. Solutions are provided.

Tener, N (1995, Winter). Information is not knowledge. *Childhood Education*, {72 (2)}, 100. Retrieved 05/08/2007, from Thomson Gale.

Tener defines critical and creative thinking and provides a rationale for teaching it. He also discusses how to develop a climate conducive to critical and creative reflection as well as how teachers can foster this kind of thinking within a variety of subject areas.

Resources for Students

Abrahams, Peter. Down the Rabbit Hole: An Echo Falls Mystery. 1st. New York: Laura Geringer Books, 2005.

Eighth-grader Ingrid Levin-Hill follows the example of her hero, Sherlock Homes, by using her intellect to solve the murder of an eccentric local woman.

Avi, The Man Who Was Poe. Flare ed. New York: Avon, 1989.

In 1848 in Providence, Rhode Island, Edgar Allan Poe reluctantly investigates the problems of eleven-year-old Edmund, whose family has mysteriously disappeared. Edmund's story suggests a new Poe tale with a ghastly final twist.

Byars, Betsy. Death's Door. New York: Viking, 1997.

Herculeah Jones, a super sleuth with her own series of mysteries, is investigating the attempted murder of her buddy Meat's uncle. They are led to a mystery bookstore named Death's Door.

Colfer, Eoin. Half-moon Investigations. 1st American ed. New York: Miramax Books, 2006.

Twelve-year-old Fletcher Moon, the youngest qualified private detective in the world, receives a diploma and gold-plated detective's shield after completing an Internet course, and sets out to solve petty crimes at school. He is forced to go on the run while

investigating the town's biggest crime family because his badge is stolen and he is framed for crimes he did not commit.

Feinstein, John. Last Shot: A Final Four Mystery. New York: Knopf, 2005.

After winning a basketball-reporting contest, eighth grade students covering the Final Four basketball tournament discover that a talented player is being blackmailed into throwing the final game. Part of a sports mystery series.

Hamilton, Virginia. The House of Dies Drear. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

An African American family of five living in an enormous house once used as a hiding place for runaway slaves experience mysterious sounds and happenings and discover secret passageways. All this makes them fear they are in serious danger.

Hoobler, Dorothy, and Thomas Hoobler. The Ghost in the Tokaido Inn. New York: Puffin, 1999.

First in an exciting series about Seikei, a merchant's son who wants desperately to be a samurai, this takes place in eighteenth century Japan. Seikei witnesses the theft of a priceless ruby at the Tokaido Inn. The local magistrate, Judge Ooka, needs Seikei's help to unravel the mystery. The Judge, a real historical character, asks him to follow a suspect and he has various adventures during which he proves his courage, honor, and loyalty to the samurai code of bushido. Just as Sherlock Holmes solves crimes, Seikei learns to observe, be logical, and reason out the motives for the crime.

Horowitz, Anthony. The Falcon's Malteser: A Diamond Brothers Mystery. New York: Puffin, 2005.

Tim Diamond, a poor-minded detective, is entrusted with a package worth five million dollars. When the owner is murdered, Tim and his brother Nick have to outwit every crook in town because each wants the package. Part of a series.

Newman, Robert. The Case of the Baker Street Irregular: A Sherlock Holmes Story. 1st Aladdin Paperbacks ed. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1978.

A young boy is brought to London by his tutor under mysterious circumstances and when the tutor is kidnapped and he himself faces the same fate, he seeks the assistance of Sherlock Holmes.

Nixon, Joan Lowery. The Weekend Was Murder!. New York: Dell, 1992.

Sixteen-year-old Liz has a summer job at an expensive hotel that involves her in a staged murder mystery weekend and then a real murder. Nixon has written many mysteries that students would enjoy.

Qualey, Marsha. Close to a Killer. New York: Delacorte Press, 1999.

Seventeen-year-old Barrie finds herself involved in a string of murders that are somehow connected to her mother's beauty salon.

Springer, Nancy. The Case of the Missing Marquess: An Enola Holmes Mystery. New York: Philomel Books, 2006.

Enola, much younger sister of Sherlock, travels to London in disguise to solve the mystery of her missing mother. First in a series about Enola.

Rose, Malcolm. Framed!. Boston: Kingfisher, 2005.

First in a series featuring a forensic scientist college student, Luke Harding, and a robot assistant. In this book, Luke must solve a series of on-campus murders for which he is being framed.

Sternberg, Libby. Finding the Forger: A Bianca Balducci Mystery. Baltimore: Bancroft Press, 2004.

Amateur high school sleuth Bianca Balducci deals with everyday problems like Christmas shopping and boyfriends while trying to solve the mystery involving forgeries replacing original art at the local museum. Part of a series.

For Older Readers at Lower Reading Levels

Gorman, Carol. Chelsey and the Green-haired Kid. Perfection Learning, 2003.

Convinced that the fatal accident she saw at the high school basketball game was not accidental, thirteen-year-old Chelsey, a paraplegic, and her unusual friend Jack join forces to prove it was a deliberate murder.

Schraff, Anne. The Accusation. Perfection Learning, 2006.

When Oscar's English teacher, Mr. Meeker, is attacked in the school parking lot, everyone believes Oscar is responsible, forcing Oscar to track down the real assaulter and clear his name.

Schraff, Anne. A Shot in the Dark. Perfection Learning, 2006.

Don tries to help the police solve a murder when his brother Julio is shot and killed in their own neighborhood.

Schraff, Anne. The Sinister Mr. Trout. Perfection Learning, 2006.

When Kiana witnesses a shooting in her neighborhood, she believes telling the truth will help a friend who is involved, but may put her in danger.

Schraff, Anne. Web of Lies. Perfection Learning, 2006.

Shane does not like the new man his mother is dating and tries to convince her the man is a criminal, but when his mother does not believe him, Shane sets out to prove to her that the man is dangerous.

Schraff, Anne. When the World Stopped. Perfection Learning, 2006.

Twelve years after his mother's death, Mark is still haunted by his memories of the night she died, causing him to wonder if his father is responsible for the fall that killed her.