



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2007 Volume II: Across the Curriculum with Detective Fiction for Young People and Adults

Crime Fiction Investigation: "Socially Correct or Not, Let Me Tell You Who Did It"

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Introduction

This curriculum unit will investigate the detective novel series of three writers, Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins series, Barbara Neely's Blanche series, and finally Chester Himes' Coffin Ed and Grave Digger series. The focus of the unit is to take students all the way through a curriculum study to make them familiar with African-American writers who have contributed exceptional mystery writing. This unit, more specifically, is intended to have students explore issues of race, economic status and gender in the creation of a story that uses the principles of the crime fiction genre.

In addition, students will learn to recognize the use of scientific methods, mainly in the police procedural aspect of Himes, and some problem solving (statistical probability) by deducing the criminal element in every story. Each of the chosen authors specifically focuses their writing during particular periods in the history of African-Americans. Therefore, students will learn writers' connections to historical context and come to understand why historical perspective is an important aspect of interpretation for comprehension. Location, settings and geographical imagery are of great importance to this unit, and students will have to connect the dots that locate the crime scene and the suspects surrounding the crime. Finally, this unit will attempt to expose and, I look forward to abolishing the foolishness of students believing in the irrational *code of the street* that "snitches get stitches." This code will be looked at from the perspective of the victim and the detective, stressing differences between right and wrong in withholding information.

Rationale

This curriculum unit is intended for use in the high school English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. More specifically, this unit is written for Philadelphia School District ELA classes. One must note that this unit is written with the School District of Philadelphia total student population in mind. Of the students the School District of Philadelphia serves, more than 80% are African-American. This unit will assist teachers in providing additional materials when meeting the criterion of adding African-American literature to the canon, as has

been prescribed by the Philadelphia School District's Office of Curriculum and Instruction.

This unit will also move students toward proficiency in standardized assessments in the areas of critically analyzing varied authors' works of fiction, showing familiarity with the elements of fiction. Students will become more able to deduce a conclusion based on facts through closely observing clues found in detective fiction. Furthermore, this unit will show students how close the connections are between literature and history. It allows students to read and write about social issues in a way that is accessible and entertaining. Students will become aware of how the African-American detective moves through the story to solve the crime or case while holding to the African-American cultural norms of a given era.

Furthermore, this unit will approach the art of detection in terms of connecting its realism to life. Students in the Philadelphia area today are living in urban war zones and need to feel empowered by what they are exposed to in the classroom. Detection in the course of the detective novel is either intuitive or reason based, and students, after having practiced these skills, will be able to use them in their everyday lives.

Objectives

In my English Language Arts classes, both 9th and 12th grade honors, there will be an established inquiry base that will open a framework of critical analysis strategies for students. In looking at and having to process crime fiction works for depth of understanding and comprehension on various levels through differentiated instruction, students will enhance a range of literary skills. Thus, they will become proficient in literary analysis skills according to Pennsylvania State Standards and the School District of Philadelphia's Core Curriculum guidelines.

Additionally, this unit will complement and support the highlighted English Language Arts eligible content areas. It meets the need for additional resources in the newly established African-American Literature theme component. This component has been prescribed by the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Curriculum and Instruction as a humanities elective. This unit will utilize state standards from Reading, Writing, and Speaking for the 11th grade student. We will also use some of the standards from the Arts and Humanities listing, as well as the History standards.

Strategies

Students will be guided in reading three novels from one or all of the authors. I will suggest when introducing this unit to classes that one author must be chosen at the very least by students to follow, study, and discuss. I would recommend that Himes' works be used in only the 12th grade honors English Language Arts class. None of the novels chosen for this unit are written for adolescents, but all of them are still well worth learning from for older students.

To introduce the concept of detection and analysis through observing language patterns and clues, I will ask students to read a children's detective story from the Kid Caramel: Private Investigator series by Dwayne J.

Ferguson or a short, short mystery for older readers such as "A Gathering of Old Men" by Ernest Gaines. This will give students some of the necessary training needed to be good observers while they read a mystery or detective story. While interacting with this unit, students will be guided in analyzing plot and character development, highlighting and discussing major and minor thematic issues, and researching the historical context. I will give assistance to students in finding and analyzing the narrative structure of each of the authors' works. Students will become familiar with formal and informal language in dialogue, as presented in the works. The importance of understanding vernacular in written form, used to depict the expressions of the African-American community both within and beyond standard English language usage, will be addressed and discussed within the unit.

I will instruct students by using various reading strategies such as: guided reading, shared reading, reading aloud, and independent reading. Students will be directed through writing assignments to assess their level of understanding of the texts they have read by using various methods of inquiry, both individually and in groups. Students will also have the opportunity to view film clips from movie adaptations of the detective stories by the same authors they have read. While reading the texts, student will be divided into—at the most—four reading centers. At each center there will be a specific text assigned. In ninth grade classes, students will choose between the Mosley and Neely detective novels. Twelfth grade students will choose to read and study from Mosley, Neely and Himes detective novels.

The reading centers will allow for a more intimate exchange of ideas between students and the text. I will help to focus student reading so that they can track clues, question historical context, examine red herrings, consider dialogue use, analyze characters, and recognize the conventions of the plot. Students will be encouraged to use the SPREADS¹ reading strategy while in student-led reading groups. This will empower students at all reading levels to participate in the group's activities.

Despite its apparently restrictive conventions, detective fiction is one of the more open forms of modern literature, one that most readers find they enjoy. It involves the transformation of a fragmented set of events into an ordered understanding. Detective fiction seems to offer a bridge between a private dream-like state and a literary experience.² The cultural background students bring into the classrooms from their family life and regional upbringing will enhance the pleasure of reading this type of novel: simply said, detective fiction is an easy read, not because it is simplistic but because there is so much in it that appeals. Students from all reading levels will be able to grasp the important issues in all of these books by using all their faculties, not just intellect.³ This unit's texts should provide excitement for students who otherwise might not want to read anything.

The Detective Fiction Genre

Detective Fiction of the kind we will read shares some of the folklore roots of the oral narrative (African tradition) and of traditional storytelling. Classical (country genteel) and hardboiled fiction offer the two types of style and context most commonly associated with detective stories. In this unit, students will focus on the hard-boiled style of writing, as that is often the favored by African-American crime writers.

Hard-boiled is distinguished by a tough portrayal of crime and violence and is normally politically radical. It sometimes shows the corruption of some type of social order, no matter the social status of the

people/community that it portrays. The hardboiled detective, as seen in all the cited authors' works, is there not only to solve mysteries of violence; he or she confronts danger and engages in some of that same violence on a regular basis. The hardboiled detective has a characteristically tough attitude. However, the detective sometimes is seen as having a personality split, one side being necessary to solve crimes, the other qualifying them to be full-fledged upstanding members of their community. This double-sidedness makes it tricky to identify the exact moral quality of the character.

There are distinctive conventions of plot, character and scenic development that are specific to the genre. These include: *analytical reasoning*, in that the detective is an observer of details that help to define setting, character and motive. The story has a *narrative approach*, frequently told in the first person or from the viewpoint of a close friend or associate of the detective. The detective usually has some *conflict with the police* and is normally not a part of the police, who either have difficulty in solving the crime or case or are too corrupt to want to do so. The setting is primarily an *urban scene*. The detective work happens in the city and/or comes from the city. The setting of the city contributes many important elements to the story in terms of motive and mystery. Most times, *plot development* is seen as the main structural device over character development. Finally, there is a *worldview* evident in the detective character, one that plays a role in his/her solution of the case. For example: a detective may believe that the rich are corrupt and selfish, and sure enough, a rich person turns out to have committed the crime.

The cultural heritage of the African-American detective, outside of his/her pursuit for truth, is collectively complex. Students will have to be guided in learning to look for particular character traits of the detective through careful observation of vernacular use in the story. For this unit, I will use the term vernacular not only for language patterns but also for patterns of behavior that are only brought into being in the African-American tradition of urban survival. African American fiction differs greatly from mainstream detective fiction in worldview, as exemplified in the beliefs of its characters. This worldview can also be experienced through the dialogue of those surrounding the detective.

The hard-boiled detective is a paid professional who gets more personally involved in the case than his classical detective counterpart. In order for students to notice this difference, they will read or view a short Sherlock Holmes story by Conan Doyle. Students will notice differences of character in the African-American detective. This detective knows what it means to be Black in America and that means decoding a complexity of African-American and White cultural signs. This type of detective uses violence and logic to solve cases. African-American detective characters are intimately connected to their surroundings and family relations, and are deeply committed to exploring the meaning of Blackness in the story, unlike their White American counterpart.

Students will have a constructed rap session about the meaning of "Blackness" presented in great depth while reading assigned stories. While in groups of four to five students, they will discuss the roots of Blackness and then will present their findings in a TV panel forum style. Corresponding questions driving this assignment will be: What does it mean to be Black in America? Does race affect the perception of your depth as an individual? Does your Blackness equate with who you are? How does being Black help or hinder you in the criminal justice system? Does being Black make you a believable witness to a crime? Does your color/race define who you are? Does that same definition apply to the person you will become? Do you feel you are related to African ancestry? Are you prejudiced based on color? Why or why not?

Students will find the African-American detective to be complex, multi-talented, and possessing a social consciousness. Early writers of the African-American detective genre transformed the formulas of the genteel

and private eye tradition into a form that allows for deeper insight into Black cultural identity through the writer's views on crime, its consequences, and detection. These early authors used action and violence to communicate a social message: issues of nationalism, politics, race pride, the inevitability of urban violence and Afrocentrism. Therefore, students will have to become involved in their own perspectives on what it means to be Black as they learn to decode the characteristics of the authors' detective(s).

Students will learn and be able to use the term "red herring" while analyzing plot development elements. A *red herring* is used as a metaphor for a misleading clue to the crime. In some detective novels, information and/or additional characters may be provided which are not necessary in solving the crime. Red herrings are frequently used in hard-boiled mysteries and films. An example of a red herring is a character who is presented to make the reader/viewer believe they are the perpetrator, when in reality it is someone far less suspicious seeming. Students will become accustomed to detecting the clever insertion of this information or character(s).

Students will respond positively to the urban territories represented in the writings of the authors chosen for this unit. Location is used to organize details in detective fiction writing. Students will be encouraged to map out the necessary details of the crime/case in order to make sense of character movement. The authors use locations that will easily enable students to have a sense of being in the middle of the action. They will be drawn to the many similarities to their own surroundings, both city and southern country style.

Three African-American Authors

"The Negro. . . , born with a veil and gifted with a second sight in this American world,. . . —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body,. . ." W.E.B. Du Bois⁴

Students will read and analyze the works of three authors for particular aspects of criminology, sociology and vernacular. The authors chosen for this unit are Walter Mosley, Barbara Neely and Chester Himes. Each of these authors has contributed to the art of writing a detective fiction series. They can be placed in the genre of hard-boiled detective fiction, unlike their writers' genteel counterparts. Nevertheless, even within the hard-boiled tradition, the main character, the African-American detective, shows distinct traits that are somewhat unlike those of Dashiell Hammett⁵ and Raymond Chandler. Mosley, Neely, and Himes have given their detectives a common wisdom. Through their use of varied subgenres, their detectives not only solve crime, they also answer overall questions posed by the communities in which they serve and live. Their detectives have a sense of community accountability beyond being responsible for solving crimes or even helping to control evil in their community. This fact, as experienced in the readings, sometimes necessitates the detective to cleanse the community of ideological as well as criminal corruption.

These three authors have masterfully crafted their detectives with Black folks in mind, as they mediate the perception of oneself as a second-class citizen due to African ancestry, both biological and cultural. These three writers lead the reader through a mythos of life and death and violence and redemption.⁶ These are the major principles of the genre.

Once this phenomenon is understood, then the African-American detective and other African-American

characters in the imagined community can see themselves realistically as American citizens. The racial inflection of life afforded by these novels will be discussed and researched in the ELA classes at all levels. Students will have to link personal perspectives and those of family, and friends to that of the authors. Whose lens do I use? What color do I see? Who or what determined this viewpoint for me? Have I changed my view from last year to this? What has shaped my views? These will be the driving questions concerning racial discussions for personal exploration exercises. These questions will give order in allowing students to question the thinking of their peers and the authors.

This kind of discussion will also take place in the form of a TV panel show, using a moderator/host and a panel of famous African-Americans. Questions will be raised from the live audience (students who are not panel participants) of viewer participants. A short lesson on the perspectives of the particular famous African-American panelists could preface the show. The panel would speak about their understanding of chosen characters from each of the stories already read by the class. Two panels will be constructed, a male panel—Tavis Smiley, Kanye West, Louis Farrakhan, Rev. Al Sharpton, and Don Cheadle—and a female panel: Maya Angelou, Oprah Winfrey, Aretha Franklin, Tyra Banks, and Queen Latifah. This TV panel will discuss the point of view of a character chosen from the reading. This show will give students an opportunity to consider varied points of view. This lesson will also allow students to talk about complicated themes and complex subplots taken from the texts, but in a discussion setting that is separated from their personal points of view. This discussion will enhance understanding of the subplots. This experience will in turn improve students' ability to respond critically to elements of literature deployed by the three authors. The questions developed for the show will have been previously composed by students, but teachers can also use developed questions from other classes. This will assist impromptu responses from panelists.

Walter Mosley

In reading Mosley, students will be aided in analyzing and understanding language by his use of African-American idioms and dialect. Students will also easily understand the geography and landscapes of his urban setting, which tend to be their own familiar settings. The challenge will be that Mosley's use of numerous characters in his Rawlins tales will require paying attention to a great many descriptions and interactions of characters within the urban scene, guiding readers toward finding the culprit or culprits: the person who committed a particular murder, together with the still more sinister characters responsible for many other crimes.

Mosley intertwines all oppressed people in his imagined communities, making them seamlessly one people, as well as one community working toward a common goal - the good of mankind. Students who become engaged in the Rawlins series will see how the common man can do well for himself, and for others if given the opportunity, while working just beyond the letter of the law. Mosley's Easy Rawlins is a Black male hero, heroic in a flawed way but in the way that Black men in America have to be. Students will connect to the sub-themes of manhood in Black America and how other groups determine the system for the African-American's gain.

In each of the novels, Easy Rawlins is requested or commanded to find someone in the Black community or to solve a series of deaths or murders. Rawlins always solves the mystery or crime/case. Easy has a trusty but violent partner, Raymond "Mouse" Alexander. "Mouse" is of the Black community and remains in the heartbeat of the community through the series. He has decidedly not looked to "The American Dream" to define his existence and worth. However, Mouse loves flashy clothes and having plenty of cash.

The first novel assigned will be *Devil in a Blue Dress*. In this novel, students are taken to South Central Los Angeles in the newly instituted Black neighborhoods of the late 1940's. Rawlins begins his employ in the

community as a sleuth by searching for what seems to be a white French woman, after having been fired from his job at an aircraft company. Students will be led to uncover that Rawlins is a tough guy with a good heart, who combines moral realism with barely checked race rage.

The second novel students will be assigned is *White Butterfly*. This novel was chosen because of Mosley's use of the term "white" in the title. The plot continues in the hard-boiled tradition and is characteristic of Mosley's character descriptions and setting. Rawlins has now married, in the common law tradition, and has adopted two children. He is requested by the police department to investigate the separate murders of four women (three Black, one White). The police suspect they have all been killed by the same person. Rawlins has established himself as having access to the Black community that the police do not, and therefore they desperately need his assistance on this case. Mosley uses a color in all his Rawlins titles, some of them not easy to code. I will give students an Attribute Web⁷ for uses of color in the text. Students will have to interact with the graphic organizer concerning the traits of this or that particular character and what color might represent. They will be required to cite passages from the text in order to justify their ideas. I will develop a chart using the acronym: STEAL: S = Speech of the character: What does the character say and how does the character speak? T = Thoughts: what is revealed through the character's thoughts or feelings? E = Effect on others: how does the character affect other people and how do the other characters react to and/or feel about the character? A = Actions: how does the character behave or what does the character do? L = Looks: what does the character look like? How does the character dress?

The third Mosley novel is *Black Betty*. In this novel, students will find that again racial identity is part of the theme. Rawlins in this novel is hired to find a Black housekeeper who is missing after the murder of her employer. Rawlins continues to maintain his family relationships; this factor breaks from the conventional tradition of the hard-boiled detective.

Rawlins in the series reacts sensitively and insightfully to the racial oppression that he and others in his community incur. The other theme that threads the series is his various attempts to buy real estate while maintaining his status in the white world as a homeowner. When describing his attitude about owning property, Easy asserts his rights as a racial equal. On this model, students will articulate their own personal views of themselves in relation to Easy's sense of what makes him a man in society. I will ask students to create self-collages. They will use pictures, words, or symbols clipped from old magazines that represent what they enjoy doing, careers they desire, people they admire, and/or things they want to own. Students will put their names on the back of their work. The collages will be hung around the room at some point during the reading; I will ask students to guess which collage belongs to whom and state why they make that guess.

Finally, students will view the adapted film version of *Devil in a Blue Dress*; they will note editorial changes made for the adaptation. This film will not be viewed as a whole but by using clips. In conjunction with the viewing, I will point students toward parallel chapters in the book. Students will be asked: What happens in the scene? Where is the setting? What happened just before or after the scene? How does the scene fit into the text as a whole? Does the scene differ from the written text? How does the idea of color figure into the film? How can this movie be seen as showing both the best and worst of African-American society? Do you think the movie is an accurate portrayal of the text or is it "Hollywood hype"? For further use of the film in the classroom, look at lesson three of this unit: Adaptation of the Detective Tale.

Barbara Neely

Students will notice in Neely's work not only her skill in the classical form of detective writing, but also her

emphasis on the implications of race in and outside of the Black community. Blanche White is an amateur detective who finds that she is sometimes pulled into helping others cope with a murder, or else stumbles upon a murder or a clue that something has gone terribly wrong. Blanche challenges the stereotype of the stupid Black maid while simultaneously addressing issues of race, color, and class-consciousness.⁸ She owes more than Easy Rawlins does to the genteel type of detective. Unlike the English aristocrats, however, she is a domestic worker. What she shares with them is their knack for solving crime because of her ability to decipher human behaviors. Also, at times there is a rural setting: Neely's first novel is set in the hometown of the sleuth, Farleigh, North Carolina.

Again, like the genteel type, she is a detached observer whose knowledge of the psychology of behavior helps her solve crimes. Blanche White shares with her readers the awareness that the shades of color within the Black community are yet another code of discrimination to negotiate. Students will further notice her scrutiny of the unceasing stereotype that the African-American is always the culprit. Furthermore, in reading Neely's work, students will delve into issues of gender and sexuality when considering the main character, Blanche White.

Reading in the Blanche series will begin with *Blanche on the Lam*. She escapes from prison after being jailed for bounced checks that she is prepared to pay. This will intrigue students from the onset. The first novel sets the tone of a far less crime-centered type of detective fiction. It focuses on the personal relationships arising from her detective work. She is hired by a White family only to stumble upon their many secrets. After she discovers a dead body, Blanche is the one who is suspected of the crime. Of course, she uncovers the real killer and goes free before landing in prison again.

The second novel is *Blanche Among the Talented Tenth*. I will provide students with the necessary background knowledge of the work of W. E. B. DuBois and other artists of the Harlem Renaissance era in order to recognize the racial identity dynamic included in the novel. Neely begins this novel with a quote from *The Talented Tenth* written by DuBois. Students will be asked to surmise the implications of this quote based on what is meant at the time when DuBois wrote it and the change in its implications at the present day. A great deal of this novel focuses on the issue of the varied colors of Black and how Blackness is defined; students will have to be guided throughout their reading. However, to offset this difficulty, students will find Neely's language comfortable and easily comprehends.

The third choice in the Blanche series is *Blanche Cleans Up*. There is some ambiguity in the phrase cleans up; students will have to consider its implication before reading the first word. It will be interesting to revisit students' notes on the title later on. In this novel, the distinct notion of the detective eradicating the poison that flows within the community is seen. In this book, Blanche must solve the death of a young Black man. While doing so, she deals with teen pregnancy, homophobia, spiritual cons, and environmental trickery. Students will be asked to identify positive characteristics of each type of person who endures prejudice in the novel.

These issues for some will be sensitive and may need to be facilitated in a teacher-led and student-friendly way. With this in mind, I suggest using groups of three or four students; arrange their seating in a circle. Each student will be given one to three minutes to speak in response to a question. While one person is speaking, others in the group must listen only - no responses or interruptions are allowed. I will give specific guidelines to the groups before beginning: A. it is a timed activity; B. students must speak from their own point of view; C. students will share only what is comfortable to them; D. they are allowed one pass if they need more time to think or don't want to respond; E. what is shared remains in the small group and this must be agreed upon

prior to the start of the activity. I will say the questions aloud, one at a time, then I will model answering the first question only. I will repeat the question again, give students time to think about it and monitor groups' engagement in the activity. Possible questions can be: 1. What do you want to say about {the issue}? What is on your mind? 2. How are you feeling? 3. What would you like to do for our community or the world to address {the issue}? I will end the session asking students to write further questions or concerns they have about {the issue} or the interaction. I will collect their writings and save them for further study, depending on the responses.

Neely's novels have readers focusing on a female detective's thought processes. The art of intuition is brought to the forefront for students who choose to read the series. The art of intuition will be an important element to understand, as students grow acclimatized to the clues embedded in Neely's texts. Besides the aforementioned traits, Neely's Blanche novels usually end in an open-ended fashion. Blanche's success in solving the mystery comes from her ability to expose victimization and oppression. In addition, issues of gender will be approached in looking at the female detective. More importantly, students will learn to admire a female detective without a formal education who can solve mystery and murder for the good of both the Black and White communities. The Blanche novels will bring a woman's perspective and awareness to the Black perspective for students.

Chester Himes

Chester Himes will be the more difficult of these authors to study. Therefore, this section of the unit is reserved for seniors in the honors English Language Arts classroom. In this section of the unit, students will delve into the meaning of their "code of the street." In reading Himes' detective novels, students will be led to question whether withholding information can be justified, and, if so, on what grounds. I shall introduce the story of Oedipus the King here, and students will be encouraged to find parallels between the thinking of Himes' detectives and that of King Oedipus, which can help to illuminate the social psychology of Himes' work.

Himes' series focuses on the police procedural from the perspective of the hard-boiled tradition, with an interweaving of Black perspective and humor. Himes' detectives are ridiculously excited, foolish and exaggerated. Himes is a master at manipulating violence through creativity and artistry. Students will take into account his biography, relating his life's story to the series' sociological premises.

Himes' obsession with the absurd and abnormal will require students to investigate every angle of possibility provided to his readers. Himes works at the pinnacle of the genre when it comes to presenting social critique that demonstrates the effects of race and poverty in the urban scene. Although students will find his work interesting, they will have to question the ethical quality of the characters in relation to community values. Himes chose to render his characters as criminals, drug dealers, con men, and religious swindlers. Students will also notice Himes' representation of the ace detectives who are employed by the city's police force as everyday hard-working men.

Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are just average policemen you might find snooping around on any street who have gained the utmost respect from their community. They serve as a bridge between the black and white worlds of Harlem. Their being employed by the local police force has not lent itself to public ridicule or contempt. They can be considered tricksters or cons themselves. It seems they always have a do-good twist for the resolution of the mystery or case. Because this detective team is unable to do anything about the direct causes of poverty that motivate crime in the neighborhood, they are exceedingly self-conscious about their ambiguous roles. However, their Blackness gives special insight into the behaviors of the people in the Harlem communities. Students will correlate Himes' own life experiences with this component of his writing

through scenario and dialogue.

Coffin Ed and Digger Jones are usually seen against a background of absurd dimensions. They begin their existence as police working within the White world who still have a passion to make right what has gone wrong in the Black community. As the series develops, they are less and less connected to the Black community. After all the "do- good" episodes, the novel series surprisingly ends with the detectives being pitted against each other. Seniors will contrast this absurdist thinking with the character Oedipus of Thebes. Oedipus, having killed his father and married his mother without knowing it, is forced to find that he himself is the criminal. Himes' detectives too have played a major part in the crimes of their community, despite the "Robin Hood" streak they possess throughout their careers. Himes stresses the similarities of the deviant to the normal person whom society has appointed to protect itself. Himes' ministers, women, and police characters are all good folks - plagued by the evil of their own society. These characters work along a thin line between order and disorder; of guilt and innocence, during the course of their efforts to search out the man, treasure or information.

Himes uses overpopulated, overpriced and dangerous Harlem as the setting for all his detective novels. This setting is the framework for his social and political statements. Seniors will be required to compare their own city's crime rate with the rate indicated in the novels of Himes. They will have to compare the motivation behind the crime or criminal with recent criminal activity in their own neighborhoods. While [they are] reading, I will bring these issues out with students through open class dialogues and small group discussions.

The first novel students will be reading is *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, the most recently written of the three. This novel has an accompanying film. It will give students a visual frame of reference. This novel is considered the best of the series. In this novel, a bale of raw cotton (the treasure) is filled with \$87,000, which had been pimped from the Black community by a religious con man. This charlatan is imploring folks to purchase tickets in a back to Africa movement - meant to end racial disparity, separation of Black peoples, and segregation for Black people in Harlem (all this in allusion to Marcus Garvey). At the end of this novel, the detectives return all of the stolen money to the community.

Next students will read *All Shot Up*. Himes includes issues of homosexuality in a violent manner in this novel. Students will be assigned to describe and investigate hate crimes and their implications for the community at large. Also, students will explore homophobia and the homophobe's psychological traits. While interacting with this novel, students will recognize the detectives as having become heroes in the community because of their previous adventures and success, which have established their reputations. The treasure in this novel is the stolen campaign funds of a local politician. The twist is that the politician is corrupt, and therefore the detectives never return the money to him. They donate it to an organization that provides vacations for poor children.

Finally, students will read Himes' first novel, *For Love of Imabelle*, also titled *A Rage in Harlem*. In Himes' style of impossible-to-believe incidents, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger must find a locked trunk that supposedly is filled with gold. Not. It is fools' gold. Interestingly enough, Himes introduces readers to Coffin Ed and Grave Digger in the eighth chapter of the book. He takes the time to set the tone in the community of Harlem and to describe the residents and their living conditions.

Aspects of Identity

Throughout this unit, there are numerous opportunities for students to become aware of their own identity through analyzing and identifying with the characters of the detectives. Vernacular as a category of expression in each novel will be studied. Students will dissect the term *background*,⁹ references to music/dance, language, and food interlaced in the detective text. In terms of language, the language of the African-American community is extremely important to the Black detective fiction tradition. Students will note characters' use of dialogue - dialect or King's English.

Students will be guided to read with easier comprehension when identifying common language traits of the Black community: marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out, rapping, playing the dozens, etc. Students will begin to note how important tone is to speech and its patterns. Students will not "get it" maybe from the printed text, but will grasp the idea of tone in hearing the written word read aloud. They will also understand the inclusion of hand and eye motions as described by the authors within their work. Voice reflects identity; the authors included in this unit consciously choose a linguistic persona for their protagonist that aligns him or her with the language of their upbringing. This establishes verbal loyalty to that cultural background. This is not to say that the protagonist has no education, it only shows the care the authors took in making the character continuous with the world in which he/she moves.

Food and music are also essential functions in establishing the Black community's identity. In all nine of the novels, students will have to digest and analyze the descriptive accompaniments of food (Mosley and Neely) and music (Mosley and Himes). This is also a part of the hard-boiled tradition, with an African-American flavor added.

Most importantly in considering cultural nuances, students will delve into *infraracial* prejudice—conflict within the Black community based on shades of skin color. This portion of the study will audaciously throw out some of the baggage that is given to African-American children at birth. Students will confront personal beliefs about being a light-skinned African-American or a dark-skinned African-American. They will be exposed to historical accounts of using skin-lightening creams to alter skin color. Also, they will have explained to them and discuss the paper bag test and what the driving force behind it was. In addition, female students will have to reconsider the value of hair straightening products and hairstyles as a cultural marker in at least one of the authors' work. Students will do a search to compare and contrast discriminatory practices in and outside of the Black community in advertisements and other printed materials.

Historical Implications

Because the time period in which each novel is set emphasized, especially in Mosley, there are imbedded in the text history lessons that one cannot ignore. In the Easy Rawlins series, study of African-American migration patterns from the Houston/Galveston, Texas areas to Los Angeles, California is part of the background. As well, students can explore the influence of music and its messages during certain political times. In the Blanche White mystery series, students can investigate the roles of domestic workers from the slave plantation to modern times. They can question how much the roles have changed from then until now.

Furthermore, in the Himes mystery series students can connect [with the] historical record of African-Americans during the Harlem Renaissance era. Furthermore, students can query how recent the history reflected in these stories is. In the Coffin Ed and Grave Digger series, students will observe the cyclical history of the African in America and the effects the slave plantation era has left upon them. Ironically, students will also notice present day woes of the African-American community embedded in the story, typically in an exaggerated fashion.

The authors have been frequently compared to authors whose worldviews are not at all the same as their own. This certainly speaks to the invisibility experienced by African-Americans writing detective stories in American society. Historical specificity is important in all the novels chosen in this unit. The authors construct a literary model of detective fiction that maps itself onto specific historical and cultural constructs. This interconnection plays an important part in all their subplots and multiple themes.

In Mosley's South Central Los Angeles, we experience a time after World War II and what it is like in the neighborhoods for the average person during that time period. Arguably, Mosley gives readers the sense, in a kind of time warp, that prohibition remains a main part of the underworld society. However, some would say his inclusion of the speakeasy in *Devil in a Blue Dress* is politically charged, in that it was quite difficult for Blacks to obtain liquor licenses to run a tavern (bar) business. Mosley's Rawlins series also sets in motion our understanding of African-American migration patterns in the US during the period. Students may be led to diagram a map using Rawlins' many references to "back home" - Houston, Texas. Finally, there is Mosley's emphasis on jazz music, suggesting the specific styles of Kansas City and the Southwest; West Coast transplants were grooving to a different beat than their contemporaries on the East Coast.

Neely's protagonist first lives in Farleigh, North Carolina, then relocates to Boston, Massachusetts. We are placed in a historical context pre-9/11. Her novel series written in the 90's allows us to surmise the time period she suggests in her narrative. She narrates her imaginary world as displacing the structure of a slave plantation, whether in Farleigh or Boston. Students may be able to trace this connection through her incessant use of differentiating characters by skin color and mannerisms of reaction/response in her series. This residual plantation mentality can also be observed in Blanche's relationships with family and employers. Blanche also worships in the way of the African; before slavery, some would say, dismissing any relation to European religious gods or practices. Secondly, Neely pokes holes in Black folks' thinking that some African-American people are above others based on color. Students may tend to agree with this view since infraracial prejudice still occurs in their lifetimes. Time will be spent on this portion of historical data and tradition. A lesson from the Harlem Renaissance era can also accompany Neely's works. Finally, students will experience Blanche's heritage and traditions in the food dishes she serves to her employers and her two children. The role of woman as mother in the Black family also plays it part. Blanche has adopted the two children of her dead sister and finds solace and purpose in that role, too - mothering a nation.

As to Himes' detective series, we know his work was written in the late 1950's and early 1960's. However, his work can make you feel as if you are in "the here and now." Himes masterfully puts together a literary series that can be viewed as timeless, although some of the music referenced can date the material. For the most part, his connecting the dots of urban life through the lens of one who is socially and politically aware is outstanding. His representations of the Panthers, religious pimps, the pimp, the church ladies, and the femme fatale have striking resemblances to all the same characters of our day. Despite these similarities, students will have to revisit the plight of Black people before, during, and after the civil rights era in order to capture the scope of Himes' historical views. Students will be able to relate to his timeless works once they understand this history. Finally, Himes' reflections and writing style correlate to jazz improvisation, and this too will evoke

what the time period represents.

Social and Economic Links

Students will deepen their understanding of the implications behind the crimes or murders taking place. Mystery novels are normally crafted so that the crime is linked to romantic interests, lust, greed, public status, personal gain, or fear for reputation. But the well-crafted detective novel includes social and economic ramifications too. In these novels, students will be guided through the interweaving of many social issues that play a major function in the economic status of a people like Black rage, race, and crime.

The theme of weakness can be seen in the detective genre, and more specifically in the African-American mystery stories. Weakness exists everywhere, but here most pointedly in characters outside of the Black community, and this is what puts the Black Detective in motion— the African-American detective as a hero. This person is allowed to probe society's weakness to rid it of crime, evil, poison. In all of the novels, the authors play with our minds like chess pieces, taking us from one social or political statement or stance to another. Because of this preoccupation with weakness in society, the solution of the crime in the detective novel can be seen to strengthen a social order that threatens to fall apart. In the African-American detective novel, not only does the detective solve crime, but also provides solace to the community they serve.

In these depicted African-American communities the vulnerability created by poverty that is always emphasized. This theme provides a foil for the champions who can restore safety and self-respect by eradicating evil. Also, the plight in which Black people are made to live, scraping what is left for them off the land and by others, allows the detective to borrow certain traits from the criminal element in the novels. While reading these novels, this distracts us from the scapegoat, the criminal, because the distinction between him and others is lessened.

During the reading and discussing of clues and details in the texts, students will have to objectively look at the factual details to fit them in the broader context of social and economic realities. Students will learn to detect social encoding while reading. They will also have to decode what they read to solve the crime before the detective does; this will positively influence students' reading habits. Students will expand their ability to detect social and economic clues in the stories by working closely in groups to draw conclusions about the worlds they find represented.

Lesson Plan 1 - Whodunit?

Objective: Students will learn the prose map used in plots of the detective fiction genre. Students will understand detective fiction vocabulary. Students will research African- American authors of the genre. The Pennsylvania State Academic Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening addressed in this lesson are: 1.1.11A, .E, & .F; 1.2.11.A, & .B; 1.4.11.B; 1.6.11.C, .D, .E, & .F; 1.8.11.B, & .C.

Materials: writing paper and large poster paper, colored markers or oil pastel crayons, Internet connection in classroom and projector.

Audience: This lesson will introduce the unit. It is designed for both 9th and 12th grade students. It can be adapted for use in a learning support ELA classroom. These daily lessons and lesson segments are designed

for a class period of 45 - 55 minutes.

Procedure: Day 1- (10 minutes) Write the term "Whodunit" on the board. Have students define the term as a journal free write (no dictionaries allowed). Later in the class period, ask students to read aloud their definitions of the term. Most likely they will not define the term correctly. For homework, ask students to find a more accurate definition of the term. Along with the correct definition, they must connect three African-American authors with the definition of whodunit. They must give a brief description of each author and list at least one title for each. In addition, they must write one question that they might ask the author about their work.

Day 2 - (45- 55 minutes) Write the term "Whodunit" on the board again. On this day, have student volunteers define the term aloud (4-6 student volunteers). Discuss the proper definition of the term and then explain to students the different types of detective fiction and other terms needed to understand the origins of the genre. (See *Appendix A*) After having worked with the vocabulary terms and definitions, students will use Sketch to Stretch strategy¹⁰ to artistically define the terms for classroom and bulletin board display. Assign students, for homework, to add at least one of the terms from the list in their descriptions of the three authors they found the previous night.

Day 3 - (45- 55 minutes) Using the Internet and the projection system, have another student name an author they listed, ask other students (one at a time) to search for the person. Students will use the Dogpile.com search engine to find photos or biographical information about the authors that will be shared with the larger group. After students find the author's photo/bio, they will copy and paste the photo in a blank PowerPoint slide for future use. Teachers can already save a blank presentation file for students to pull up for use. Next, another student who has research information about the same author will give a brief synopsis about the author, as well as a title of their work. The student at the computer will type the author's name and the title onto the slide. Students will find at least 28 African-American authors in this genre. At the end of the lesson, for homework students must find out about the detective series of Mosley, Neely, and Himes.

Assessment: Teachers should look for students' willingness to participate and being open to new information. Teachers should also check students' written work from the onset of the lesson until the end. The objective learning outcomes are all measurable by traditional methods.

Lesson Plan 2 - Serialized Secrets

Objective: Students will learn to critically analyze clues and motives using a mystery novel. Students will also learn to decipher the elements of detective fiction through plotting the clues of the mystery or crime. The Pennsylvania State Academic Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening addressed in this lesson are: 1.1.11.D, .G, & .H; 1.2.11.A; 1.3.11.B, .C, & .F; 1.5.11.A, .B, .F, & .G; 1.6.11.A, .B, .C, .D, & .E.

Materials: Children's mystery or detective novels, preferably the *Kid Caramel* series, large chart paper, 5 x 8 index cards, colored markers, and tape or push pins if using a cork board for display.

Audience: This lesson can be used in any high school ELA classroom. This lesson can be completed in one or two 45-55 minute class periods.

Procedure: Students must have read and interacted with the assigned novel. Day 1 - Before the completion of the story (in reading most of these stories, stop before the next to last chapter), the teacher will ask students to go back to the beginning of the story and tell the class what the first clue is. Next, the teacher will ask students why it should be considered a clue and what is the motive behind the clue. As students are sharing answers or grappling with the given information, the teacher or another student will write the clue on an index card and then tape it to the chart paper. Proceed this way until all clues have been written down. Have another student draw a diagram of the event that needs to be explained. Finally, have a student take a clue and map it on another chart paper as part of a sequence of numbered clues. The chart paper should look like a story map at this point. Ask students to list the suspects alongside the drawn diagram. Assignment: Ask students to solve the mystery for homework. They must justify their answers with concrete examples and explanations from the story.

Day 2 - Ask students to turn in their written work. Revisit and review the clues displayed on the diagram. Then, read as a group the final two chapters of the book. Students will look forward to hearing who committed the crime. After completion of the story, ask two or three students to call out the culprits as named by their classmates from the turned-in work. An entertaining discussion should ensue.

Alternative approach: Have student groups map clues as indicated above, except this time omitting one or two of the clues and one suspect. Present the class the information. Assign students the question: Whodunit? This can be accomplished when students are reading particular novels in their specified groups. If the whole class is reading the novel together, this approach will not be successful.

Assessment: Students should be able to decode complex motives, make basic premises about probable criminality, recognize suspects, spot red herrings, and discover the role of language. Therefore, after this lesson students will be able to deal with the higher-level reading of the genre as the groups progress in using this unit.

Lesson Plan 3 - Adaptation of the Detective Tale

Objective: Students will view films that correspond with the novels of Mosley and Himes. Students will have to discern the similarities and differences from the written word and the visual structure of the word. Students will also focus on characterization details and editorial changes that alter the plot sequencing. The Pennsylvania State Academic Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening addressed in this lesson are: 1.1.11.B; 1.3.11.E; 1.4.11.D; 1.5.11.B, .C., .D, .E., .F, & .G; 1.6.11.A, .B, .C, .D, & .E; 1.7.11.B. The Pennsylvania State Academic Standards in the Arts and Humanities addressing learning outcomes are: 9.1.12.K; 9.3.12.A, .C, & .F; 9.4.12.C. The Pennsylvania State Academic Standards in History are: 8.1.12.C; 8.3.12.A, .C, & .D.

Materials: Films (DVD or VHS), TV with DVD player or VCR or projection system, VHS or DVD hardware in computer equipment, poster or chart paper, writing paper.

Audience: This lesson is designed for both 9th and 12th grade students. The students will already have a base knowledge of film terminology to use to view films for critical analysis. These daily lessons are designed for a class period of 45 - 55 minutes. Teachers take note that these films contain adult content and need to be

previewed before student viewing for editing.

Procedure: This is a two to three day lesson that can be conducted in a 45-55 minute period. Teachers must cue films to the section to be viewed if using VHS tapes before the first day of the lesson, but if using a DVD this step is not needed. Day 1 - give students questions they will have to answer before showing them the chosen clip(s) or the entire film. (See *Appendix B*) At least 10 minutes before the end of the class, stop film; ask students to retell what they saw, referring their answer to at least one question that was given them at the beginning of the class. Assign three questions, answered in the form of a constructed response for homework.

Day 2 & Day 3 - continue showing clips/film and encourage students to answer questions while they view so that after this showing there can be an intelligent discussion about the film's similarities and differences from the text. Assign the remainder of the questions for homework.

Assessments: Use the following questions to provide closure for the lesson and to also get reflective essay answers from students: What was the most enjoyable aspect of comparing the written story to its film interpretation? What was the most surprising thing about the differences/similarities between the story and the film? What effect do you feel this film had on its viewers, especially those viewers who had read the book? What conclusions have you reached about the process of creating a film adaptation of a literary work? For each of these questions students will have to cite two or three examples from the film and text to have a complete answer. Teachers can elect to have students answer all of the essay questions or they can be directed to select two essay questions to answer in depth.

Student Resources

Ferguson, Dwayne J. *Kid Caramel: Private Investigator - Case of the Missing Ankh*. New Jersey: Just Us Books, Inc., 1997. The first of four books in a series about an African-American child detective.

—. *Kid Caramel: Private Investigator - The Werewolf of PS 40*. New Jersey: Just Us Books, Inc., 1998. The second story of the African-American children's literature series.

—. *Kid Caramel: Private Investigator - Mess at Loch Ness*. New Jersey: Just Us Books, Inc., 2003. The third story of the African-American children's literature series.

—. *Kid Caramel: Private Investigator - Ghost Ranch-The Legend of Mad Jake*. New Jersey: Just Us Books, Inc., 2004. The fourth story of the African-American children's literature series.

Gaines, Ernest, J. "Robert Louis Stevenson Banks, aka Chimley." *African-American Literature: Voices in a Tradition*. Austin: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1988, 513-516. A great short story that leads to the film of the entire story "A Gathering of Old Men."

Himes, Chester B. *A Rage in Harlem/For Love of Imabelle*. New York: Vintage Books, 1957. This is the first story in the Coffin Ed and Digger Jones detective novel series.

—. *All Shot Up*. Chatham, New Jersey: The Chatham Bookseller, 1960. This is the fifth book in the Coffin Ed and Digger Jones series.

—. *Cotton Comes to Harlem*. New York: Buccaneer Books, 1965. This is the seventh book in the Coffin Ed and Digger Jones series.

Mosley, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress*. New York: Norton, 1990. This is the first book in the Easy Rawlins detective novel series.

—. *Black Betty*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1994. This is the fourth book in the Easy Rawlins detective novels in the series.

—. *White Butterfly*. New York: Norton, 1992. This is the third book in the Easy Rawlins detective series.

Neely, Barbara. *Blanche on the Lam*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. This is the first of the Blanche White detective novel series.

—. *Blanche Among the Talented Tenth*. This is the fourth story in the Blanche White detective series.

—. *Blanche Cleans Up*. New York: Viking, 1998. This is the third story in the Blanche White detective novel series.

Teacher Resources

Berger, Roger A. "The Black Dick: Race, Sexuality and discourse in the L.A. novels of Walter Mosley." *African American Review*, 1997. A resource for teachers.

Byrd, Max. "The Detective Detected: From Sophocles to Ross MacDonald." *The Yale Review*, v. 64: 1974, 72-83. A resource for teachers.

Crooks, Robert. "The Far Side of the Urban Frontier: The Detective Fiction of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley." *College Literature* v.22: 3; October 1995. A resource for teachers.

English, Daylanne K. "The Modern in the Postmodern: Walter Mosley, Barbara Neely, and the Politics of Contemporary African-American Detective Fiction." *American Literary History*, v. 18: 4; 2006, 772-796. A resource for teachers.

Freese, Peter. *The Ethnic Detective: Chester Himes, Harry Kemelman, Tony Hillerman*. Essen, Germany: Verl. Die Blaue Eule, 1992. A great resource for teachers considering instruction using any of the authors listed in the title. Note: it is written in English.

Most, Glenn W. and Stowe, William W. *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. A loaded resource for teachers.

Pennsylvania Department of Education. "Academic State Standards". 1999-2003.

http://www.pde.state.pa.us/stateboard_ed/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=76716&stateboard_dNav=|5467|. Accessed 3/14/07. This website gives detailed information about each state standards that are approached in the objectives and lessons contained in this unit. This is an excellent resource for teachers.

Porter, Dennis. *The Pursuit of Crime*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981. This research text is a good teacher resource to use before instructing students when using detective fiction.

Reddy, Maureen T. *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003. A wonderful resource for teachers who plan to use crime fiction in their research or in the classroom.

School District of Philadelphia. *Access to the Core Curriculum Strategies Guide*. Philadelphia: Songhai Press, 2006. A resource guide

aimed to empower educators to connect the core curriculum guides to assist teachers of students in special education.

<http://phila.schoolnet.com/outreach/philadelphia/teachersstaff/oss/>.

Hathaway, Rosemary V. "The Signifying Detective: Barbara Neely's Blanche White, Undercover in Plain Sight." *Critique*, v. 46: 4; p320-332; Summer 2005. A critical essay written about the work of Barbara Neely. A great read that accompanies the author's works well.

School District of Philadelphia. *Book 1 Secondary Education Movement: Core Curriculum - Literacy*. Philadelphia: School Reform Commission, 2003. A resource book used to assist teachers in formulating lesson plans for English classes in high schools. This gives a vast number of lesson ideas and multi-subject teaching strategies.

Soitos, Stephen F. *The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996. An excellent resource for background information regarding the genre. It is great for teachers.

Springfield City Library. <http://www.springfieldlibrary.org/reading/blackdetectives.html>. Springfield, Mass., May 1, 2007. Accessed 7/3/2007. A one-stop website resource for finding African-American writers of detective fiction and more. This website is a great resource for teachers and students.

Turner, Jimmie Richard. "Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones: Violence and Humor in the Mystery Novels of Chester Himes." *The Black Scholar*. v. 28:1; 2001. This is an excellent critical essay; it is short and succinct.

Wilson, Charles E. *Walter Mosley: A Critical Companion*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood

Press, 2003. This book provides a detailed criticism and interpretation of several Mosley detective novels. It also provides Mosley enthusiasts with an overview of his life and his literary contributions beyond detective fiction.

Winks, Robin W., ed. *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980. This text is a great resource for background information allowing teachers to tap into the literary criticism of the time.

Woods, Paula L., ed. *Spooks, Spies and Private Eyes: Black Mystery, Crime, and Suspense Fiction*. New York: Doubleday, Inc., 1995. A wonderful anthology, students can use this too. A must read for teachers.

Filmography

A Gathering of Old Men. DVD. Dir. Volker Schlöndorff, Wr. Ernest Gaines and Charles Fuller. Bioskop Film, 1987. A made for television movie, its adaptation goes along with the written story rather well.

Cotton Comes to Harlem. DVD. Dir. Ozzie Davis, Wr. Chester Himes. Formosa Productions, Inc., 1970. This is a wonderful film adaptation of the original story. This is very funny and veteran teachers will enjoy watching the line of great actors and actresses directed by the late Ozzie Davis.

Devil in a Blue Dress. DVD. Dir. Carl Franklin. Writer Walter Mosley and Carl Franklin. Clinica Estetico. 1995. This is an enjoyable film that includes Denzel Washington in the role of Easy Rawlins and Don Cheadle as "Mouse." It is an involved film adaptation of the written work.

Notes

SPREADS: S: skim the assigned text; P: pick meaning from the title by paraphrasing; R: read, retell and take notes; E: evaluate information and clues; A: analyze what was read; D: provide details; S: Summarize what you have read.

Glenn Most and William W. Stowe, *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, p. 79.

Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction*, p. 82.

W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks: Essays and Sketches*. 1903.

Red Harvest, 1929.

Robin W. Winks, ed., *Detective Fiction: a Collection of Critical Essays*, "The Criticism of Detective Fiction" by George Dove, p. 206.

Attribute Web is a graphic organizer that visually represents related ideas to describe someone or something. Colors will be used in the center of the web, used on an interactive whiteboard. *Book 1 Secondary Education Movement: Core Curriculum- Literacy*, p. G1.

Paula L. Woods, *Spooks, Spies and Private Eyes: . . .*, p. xviii.

Stephen F. Soitos, *The Blues Detective: A Study of African-American Detective Fiction*, p. 37.

Sketch-to-Stretch is an exercise that asks student to create a picture or other graphic representation to illustrate their understanding of a concept or a term. Only the word or concept phrase can be included on the artwork. Students work in groups using large sheets of paper. *Book 1 Secondary Education Movement: Core Curriculum- Literacy*, p. G5.

Appendix

Detective Fiction Vocabulary List - Appendix A

Whodunit
Detective fiction
Hard-boiled
Police procedural
Country genteel
Private investigator
Analysis
Intuition
Forensic
Closed room mystery
Suspects
Clues
Detective

Film Questions - Appendix B

1. Discuss the symbolism or social implications of cigarettes and alcohol of the period and how they are used in the film.

2. Big city vs. country people - the up and coming middle class: how does the director portray this and the subject of the American Dream?
3. What does the use of music tell you about the scene(s) in the film?
4. List as many racial assertions as you can that are found in the film and explain your responses.
5. Discuss the conflicts viewed between the characters in the film and compare it to the conflicts in the characters in the text (decide on three characters).
6. How is color used in the film? What statements are being made in its use?
7. How has Black-on-Black crime evolved from the film's time period to present day? Use at least two examples from the film and discuss the ramifications in detail.
8. Examine cultural issues as reflected in the film and compare them to your own personal experiences.
9. What does it mean to have an absurdist view? Have you seen any absurd activity in the film? Explain your answer; support it using at least three details.
10. How is urban violence portrayed in the film? Evaluate the cultural/social issues initiating the situation(s).

Pennsylvania State Academic Standards - Appendix C

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening Standards

- Learning to Read Independently
- Reading Critically in All Content Areas
- Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature
- Types of Writing
- Quality of Writing
- Speaking and Listening
- Research

Standards for the Arts and Humanities

- Production, Performance and Exhibition of Dance, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts
- Critical Response
- Aesthetic Response

Standards for History

- Historical Analysis and Skills Development
- United States History

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