Mysteries in Literature

In this part of the unit the students read a variety of mystery stories.

Make a chart of the different elements which are necessary for a story to be classified as a mystery:

- a crime (prank) has been committed
- there is a detective
- there are suspects
- there are clues to the solution of the mystery in the story

After the students have read a mystery we discuss it and identify why it can be classified as a mystery. I also have them write book reviews of the mysteries they read. The book reviews must contain the following information:

1. title of the book
2. author and illustrator
3. brief synopsis of the plot (but don’t give the story away)
4. reader’s opinion of the book

After studying various mystery stories, the students are ready to write their own mystery. There is a lot of pre-writing they do before they actually begin writing their mystery. Through the completion of the activities, their mystery is completely planned before they ever begin writing their first draft.

Activity 1: Choose the setting: time and place

You are going to begin writing a mystery story in class today. This story will take several sessions to complete. Before you can begin writing your story, there are many decisions you have to make. Your activity today is to choose a setting for your story. The setting is where your story will take place. A mystery can take place anywhere, but some ideas to get you started are: a schoolroom, a museum, a bank, your house, on a train, or in an airport. Be sure to include the time the crime was committed in the setting of your story.

Activity 2: What is the crime?

In order for a story to be a mystery, there must be a puzzle to be solved. Usually there is a crime or prank that has been committed. You must decide what crime or prank has been committed in your story. You may not choose a violent crime such as murder. Some suggestions are finding a stolen bike, discovering who is changing the students’ grades in the school computer, discovering who put soap in the fountain downtown, and discovering who keeps eating Mary’s apple out of her school lunch.
Activity 3: Who are the suspects?

In this activity, you must create the suspects for your case. You must have at least 5 suspects. You will need to write a short description of each suspect. Be sure to include their motive for the crime. You need to decide which of these suspects will commit the crime.

Activity 4: What are the suspects’ alibis?

In this activity you will create alibis for your suspects. You need to give two of your suspects’ strong alibis, two shaky alibis, and have one suspect who has no alibi.

Activity 5: Who is the detective in your story?

In this activity you will create the detective for your story. The detective can be a child or an adult. Describe your detective and tell a little bit about him/her. Does your detective have a sidekick? If so, describe him/her also.

Activity 6: What is the evidence in your story?

In this activity you will decide upon the forensic and circumstantial evidence in your story. Forensic evidence can include fingerprints, fibre evidence, footprints, lip prints, blood, teeth marks, a ransom note, items left at the crime scene belonging to suspects, human and animal hair. Other evidence can include eyewitness accounts, things a suspect has told someone else, lack of an alibi, being in the area of the crime when it was committed, and motive.

Activity 7: What are the clues in the story?

In this activity you will create clues to include in your story which lead to the suspects. You may even want to include a red herring or false clue to throw your readers off the track. These clues might include results of forensic tests, corroboration of alibis, motives, or anything else you think might be helpful to the reader in determining the culprit.

Activity 8: What is the sequence of events in your story?

In this activity you are really writing an outline of your story. You are telling what happened first, and the events that follow right down to the solution of the case.

Activity 9: Writing the story- first draft

It is now time for you to write the story. You must decide who will tell the story. Will you write it from the viewpoint of the detective? Will you write it in present tense, past tense, or will you write it as a flashback? The first paragraph of your
story needs to set the scene for the crime and it needs to be exciting. The first paragraph is the hook for your readers. Be sure to include information about what crime was committed, when, and where it was committed. Do not worry if you haven’t included all your details. This is your first draft. It important for you to get as many of your ideas down on paper as possible.

**Activity 10: Revising your story**

It is now time to revise your story. Did you use expanded sentences and correct spelling and punctuation? Did your story include details? Did your story follow a logical sequence of events? When you are satisfied with your revisions, type or print out your story. You may illustrate it if you like.

**Activity 11: Making a cover for your story and a title page**

You will need to use a piece of card stock to make a cover for your book. Your cover needs to include an illustration, title, and author and illustrator names. You may print the text out on the computer and then illustrate the cover, or you may write the text by hand.

**Activity 12: Making the back cover of your book**

You will need to use a piece of card stock to make the back cover for your book. The back cover needs to contain a brief synopsis of your story and information about you as the author. You may print the information by hand, or you may use the computer.