

# Whodunit: Mystery and Suspense in Literature and Film

## Day 1

### Morning:

Students introduce themselves, naming their favorite mystery.

"Hungry Bookworm" puzzle -- relate to idea of literary conventions / mysteries.

Discussion of class goals.

Class rules (safe learning environment, respect, doing best work).

Mystery and Suspense brainstorm (students word-associate for each category).

Evil twin / WANTED poster exercise: on 11 x 17" paper, students created a large "nametag" to hang from their desks, including a drawing of their evil twin with crime and distinguishing characteristics.

Mini-lecture: advice about active reading--taking notes and underlining, etc.

### Afternoon:

Read Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" aloud and discuss. Advice about asking questions. Intro. to journal writing.

Paper #1: write a brief essay identifying suspense and mystery elements in "Tell-Tale Heart"

### Evening:

Group reading of Futrelle's "The Problem of Cell 13." We "sealed" the final section of the story with Post-it notes; using index cards with character names (including a "narrator" card), we read a page or two before switching cards in order to give everyone a chance to read different parts. This worked well, and kept kids on their toes as we read). Students were also instructed to underline clues while reading.

Without reading the final section, we listed the clues on the board and ranked their importance.

## Day 2

### Morning:

Journal entry about Futrelle, trying to guess the story's solution.

Finish reading Futrelle aloud, w/discussion.

Proofreading symbols and editing suggestions; return first paper with comments; conference or check-in with individual students.

Students begin reading Poe, "Murders in the Rue Morgue."

Students play "Rock, Paper, Scissors" -- discuss how to "win" this game, as a way of understanding the chess/checkers dissertation at the opening of Poe's story.

**Afternoon:**

Mini-lecture: Gothic and Sensation Literature as precursor to detective fiction (preparation for the evening film viewing).

Finish reading Poe, "Murders in the Rue Morgue." Begin "The Purloined Letter."

Discussion of Dupin mystery stories.

**Evening:**

Film viewing: *Dracula* (1931).

**Day 3****Morning:**

"Cool sentences" exercise: students "workshop" sentences from their essays to appreciate and improve them.

Lying exercise: 3 students given outrageous stories to tell in order to try to make them convincing. (Lesson: the techniques we need to tell a good lie are also necessary when telling the truth--preparation for their autobiographical essay).

Mini-lecture: Why study film? Is film an art form? Brainstorm elements of film.

Group work: 3 groups work w/study questions and articles about film study.

**Afternoon:**

Paper #2: Autobiographical essay. A "Real Life" mystery.

**Evening:**

Read Doyle, "The Speckled Band" and "A Scandal in Bohemia."

Extra reading: Bret Harte, "The Stolen Cigar Case."

**Day 4****Morning:**

Journal entry: Poe and Doyle.

Discussion: comparison of Dupin and Holmes as detectives.

Share story ideas; continued writing on paper #2.

**Afternoon:**

Continued writing and reading.

Optional journal challenge: write a parody of one of the stories we've read.

Handouts: What is a film storyboard? Discuss.

**Evening:**

Storyboard activity. 3 groups work separately to storyboard a sequence of events from the most suspenseful moment of "The Speckled Band."

Film: *The Speckled Band* (BBC adaptation).

**Day 5****Morning:**

Presentations of storyboard. Repeat viewing of this scene from the film in order to see how students approached the same material differently.

Journal writing, including challenge to draw the structure of a story (students shared these, and tried to guess which story was represented).

Read aloud, Glaspell, "A Jury of Her Peers."

**Afternoon:**

Follow-up discussion of Glaspell

Carr, "The Bride Vanishes": reading of script along with radio play.

**Evening:**

Handout: film terms and discussion

Film clips, pointing out examples of terms we discussed.

**Day 6****Morning:**

Journal entry: reaction to film clips and what they learned about key film techniques.

Workshop instructions. Each student assigned an "expert" role to comment on about each paper (Beginning, Ending, Plot/Story, Dialogue, Sentences, Paragraphs, Grammar, Details/Description, Organization, Suspense/Mystery).

Workshop of essay #2.

**Afternoon:**

Create "props" or nametags for our reading of Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* (we passed these around instead of the 3 x 5 cards, to switch which student got to read each role). Also made small statue figures out of construction paper to knock over as indicated during our reading each time a character is killed.

Begin reading *Ten Little Indians*.

Assign Paper #3: Review / Argumentative Summary of film or story.

Mini-lecture: essay structure. "Keyhole" diagram.

**Evening:**

Begin writing paper.

**Day 7****Morning:**

Groupwork: class creates "suspects" for mystery to be presented to Biotechnology sections for their solution. Included creation of props ("threatening" notes written to the "victim").

Continue essay writing.

Extra readings: Rinehart, "The Lipstick," and Gault, "See No Evil."

**Afternoon:**

Visit to Biotechnology class. Students share their motives.

Finish group reading of *Ten Little Indians*.

**Evening:**

Film: *And Then There Were None*

Practice readings for tomorrow.

**Day 8****Morning:**

Class readings (shared their essays with other classes, Writing and Imagination and Writing the Expository Essay).

Discussion of *And Then There Were None*.

Journal comparing play with film adaptation.

**Afternoon:**

Short clip from *Double Indemnity* film to give students a sense of how to read "hard-boiled" dialogue.

First paragraph of *Double Indemnity* novel: What questions are raised? What kind of novel do you expect from this kind of opening?

Read aloud from Cain, *Double Indemnity*.

**Evening:**

Continue reading Cain novel (1/2 class read aloud; the other half read silently, with additional reading of Carr, "Footprints in the Sky" if students finished early).

## **Day 9**

### **Morning:**

Workshop of paper #3.  
Continued reading of *Double Indemnity*.

### **Afternoon:**

Revision time (students revise workshopped essay).  
Preparation for film viewing, including critical articles about film noir.

### **Evening:**

Film: *Double Indemnity*.

## **Day 10**

### **Morning:**

Journal comparing film and novel of *Double Indemnity*.  
Continued revision time.  
Begin reading of Woolrich, "Rear Window."

### **Afternoon:**

"Crime Scene" with Biotechnology class  
Carr, "Will You Make a Bet with Death?": reading of script along with radio play.

### **Evening**

Film: *Rear Window*.

## **Day 11**

### **Morning:**

Journal and discussion of *Rear Window*.  
Continue reading Woolrich, "Rear Window."  
Paper #4 assigned: Critical or Creative Paper (several options).

### **Afternoon:**

Discuss Van Dine, "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Fiction."  
Class summarizes rules on board, then votes on which rules they agree with.  
Discussion: see which stories/films followed the rules they favored.

**Evening:**

Begin writing paper #4.

Readings: Chandler, "I'll Be Waiting" and McBain, "Small Homicide."

**Day 12****Morning:**

Journal and discussion of Woolrich, Chandler, McBain; continue writing paper #4.

Clues to play "Clue" -- students seek to find hidden cipher clue that eventually lets them play the Clue game.

**Afternoon:**

Continue writing paper #4, w/mini-group peer editing (help each other proofread, etc.).

Vote on movie for Wednesday evening session.

**Evening:**

Grafton, "The Parker Shotgun," Hillerman, "Chee's Witch," Faulkner, "An Error in Chemistry," Queen, "The Adventure of Abraham Lincoln's Clue."

Students sign up for a story to present to class, and prepare for presentation (What elements make the story a good mystery? What does the story have in common with other stories we have studied? What type of mystery is the chosen story? Plus other comments on: writing style, clues, solution, detective's character, etc.).

**Day 13****Morning:**

Continued reading and preparation for presentations.

Discussion of stories.

"Press Conference" with Biotechnology. The killer revealed!

**Afternoon:**

Student Presentations: Recommend a good mystery story.

**Evening:**

Film: *Young Sherlock Holmes*.

## **Day 14**

### **Morning:**

End-of-session Reading (with 3 other writing classes).

### **Afternoon:**

Mystery and poetry: Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess."

Catch-up readings (students have opportunity to finish stories recommended by their peers).

Student evaluation of class.

## **Day 15**

End of session discussion, with individual conferences.