Write Me a Mystery

Subject: Secondary Language Arts

Grade Level: 11

Rationale or Purpose: Working as a collaborative writing team, students will (in groups of 4-6) Pre-write, draft, edit and revise a murder mystery short story. By doing this, students will hone skills in short story drafting, editing and revision, group collaboration and computer use.

Materials: Computers and internet access
Websites:
- HRC Link - http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/online/teachingthetwenties/theme_viewer.php?theme=modern&section=murder&subsect=1

  NOTE: For easy access to VISUALS please use sidebar links to Murder Mystery Image Gallery
- Writing Collaboration Site - http://writeboard.com/
- Elements of a Murder Mystery - http://www.riverdale.k12.or.us/~epopick/homework/mysteryelements.htm
- Glossary of Detective novel lingo/slang - http://www.miskatonic.org/slang.html

Lesson Duration: Two to four 90 minute class blocks or four to six 45 minute classes. >>Dependant on length and requirements for writing process.

Objectives: English III
110.44 (1A-C) - the student writes in a variety of forms for various audiences and purposes.
110.44 (2A-E) - use prewriting strategies to generate ideas, develop voice, and plan; develop drafts both alone and collaboratively by organizing and reorganizing content and by refining style to suit occasion, audience, and purpose; proofread writing for appropriateness of organization, content, style, and conventions; frequently refine selected pieces to publish for general and specific audiences; and use technology for aspects of creating, revising, editing, and publishing texts.
110.44 (3A-C) - the student relies increasingly on the conventions and mechanics of written English, including the rules of usage and grammar, to write clearly and effectively.
110.44 (4 E, F & G) - the student uses writing as a tool for learning.
110.44 (5A-B) - the student evaluates his/her own writing and the writings of others. The student is expected to evaluate writing for both mechanics and content; and respond productively to peer review of his/her own work.

110.44 (6A) - the student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies. The student is expected to establish and adjust purpose for reading such as to find out, to understand, to interpret, to enjoy, and to solve problems

110.44 (8A) The students read to be to be informed, to take action, and to discover models to use in his/her own writing

110.44 (9A) - The student reads widely, including American literature, to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements across cultures. The student is expected to recognize distinctive and shared characteristics of cultures through reading.

110.44 (20B) - The student analyzes and critiques the significance of visual representations. The student is expected to deconstruct media to get the main idea of the message's content.

Activities:

> **Step 1:** Put students in groups of four to six.
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> **Step 2:** Take students to the HRC website and have them read* the *Introduction, Elevating Pulp Fiction* and *Lawyer Turned Detective* sections of the *Murder Mystery*. Additionally, have students take notes of key terms and elements as described in the readings (for example hyperbole, caricature, distortion, Hard-boiled, etc.). While they are visiting the site, have students explore and view the images of the novel jackets and the PLOT WHEEL (explain that this is a means for prewriting and organizing a story and that they will be prewriting in their group to prepare for writing their detective/murder mystery).
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> **Step 3:** Have students access and read the *Elements of Murder Mystery* site and to look at and read the images associated with the Detective Novel aka Murder Mystery. Have them note language and dialogue in the chapter samples.
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> **Step 4:** Have students peruse the *Glossary of Detective Novel Lingo/slang* site to become familiar with Detective Novel lingo and tell them they will be using this to add authenticity to their story.
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> **Step 5:** Prewriting – students should brainstorm and using the Elements of a Murder Story as a guide, decide on setting, characters, the crime, the suspects, clues, evidence and so on. Have students create a PLOT WHEEL as seen on the HRC site. Furthermore *Inspiration software* is wonderful for prewriting, but if not available, old fashioned spider graphs, outlines, cluster graphs, and lists are good too.
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> **Step 6:** Using the Writeboard.com website, have each group set up an account and peruse the site to see how it works. They will be using this site to draft their stories in a *Round Robin* style writing format - where one student begins the story – or a teacher can present "story starters" - and then students can write one after the other each building on what the previous student(s) wrote. Have the students continue the *Round Robin* writing process until the story is complete. In Writeboard, all changes, additions, and drafts can be kept separate, so students can collaborate and create a group made story. Note this step can be done with Microsoft word or other word processing software, but writeboard.com saves all drafts and is more interactive. **NOTE:** Remind students to add detective LINGO to their stories. Short stories must include DIALOGUE.**

Step 7: After a first draft is created, groups can peer and self edit, proofread, edit, add on and revise their stories. Teachers can offer teacher/student conferences as well.

*Depending on ability levels, a vocabulary list may be helpful.
**A lesson on dialogue writing might be in order.

Modifications: Provide vocabulary definitions. Make sure to balance groups – ability levels, second language issues, etc. As this is a group activity, it is important for the teacher to monitor student participation.

Student Product: All prewriting (including the Plot Wheel) and final group created Murder Mystery – Detective story.
Additionally, students could create front and back covers for their stories – like the book jackets on the HRC website. If desire they can add illustrations or pictures as well.

Closure: Have students share their stories. As an option, students could illustrate their stories in PowerPoint or in Digital story telling and publish them online.

Assessment:

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