

Topical Unit: Suspense

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Rationale

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Suspense, the topic of this unit, is a significant topic and genre because it both fascinates human beings and allows us to address our fears in a safe way. Sharon Begley quotes Stuart Fischhoff, professor emeritus of psychology at California State University, Los Angeles, and senior editor of the online Journal of Media Psychology, in a news article from The Daily Beast website that discusses the appeal of suspenseful and scary movies. Fischhoff says, “One of the major reasons we go to scary movies is to be scared...[but] we know that, in an hour or two, we’re going to walk out whole. We’re not going to have any holes in our head, and our hearts will still be in our bodies.” Rick Cypert, professor of English at Nebraska Wesleyan University, elaborates on this idea, arguing that suspense can be an emotionally healthy way to address fear. He writes, “A reader or viewer enjoys suspense, one might say, because of the benefit to the self: that is, what one might learn from gazing into another world...We can see the mixed emotions of panic and pleasure operating in suspense: the unconscious fear comes to life, but in the context of the suspense genre, may be addressed, captured, and made sense of” (Cypert 12-13). Due to both our fascination with suspense and the benefits it provides, elements of suspense are abundant in popular media and culture — from children’s literature to crime journalism to reality television shows. By examining suspense — what it is, where it appears, and how it functions — we can better understand why suspense is so popular and what it indicates about human beings and fear.

This topical unit is designed for class of 8th grade boys, a group that is typically fascinated with suspense in all of its manifestations. Begley explains that teens and young adults enjoy suspense more than any other demographic because they naturally seek out intense experiences and have fewer real life fears (such as foreclosure or unemployment) than adults.

Because of their natural affinity for suspense, a class of 8th grade students would naturally be interested in this topical unit. Many students of this age have already encountered suspense in film, television and even video games. By introducing students to suspenseful literature that contains many elements of the suspenseful media they are already consuming, it is hoped that they might become more interested in recreational reading and seeking out quality suspense literature. Lastly, suspenseful literature can also help students meet many of their grade level objectives in a compelling and interesting way. Because suspense is a technique as well as a genre, it can be used to examine plot, character, setting, and the elements of storytelling. As students explore how a writer creates suspense, they may be inspired to write their own suspenseful literature, putting into practice what they have learned. Because suspense naturally appeals to students of this demographic, it is an exciting way to get 8th grade students interested in literature and to meet their grade level objectives.

The class for which this unit is designed is made up of a culturally diverse group of mid to lower middle class boys in an inner or first-ring suburb. Academically, these students are average. They are good readers but are not always motivated and need extra encouragement to excel at academic work. Socially, these students are involved in activities such as athletics and scouting, but like many middle school students, prefer video games, television, and the Internet to most group activities. Many of the students read for pleasure, mostly comic books about superheroes and crime stories and young adult literature about athletics, scary stories, or science fiction/fantasy. They enjoy television shows and movies that deal with the same ideas: athletics, superheroes, science fiction/fantasy, comedy and horror. They also enjoy a variety of music, mostly rock and hip-hop. Like many 8th grade students, they are concerned about their friendships and fitting in socially. They also are concerned about what life will be like once they

begin high school. Most of the students have supportive and stable families, but many have experienced some concerns over having divorced or single parents. Because adulthood seems so distant for them, they are mostly preoccupied with the present: having fun, fitting in, getting into some trouble without getting caught.

The first selection to be used in this unit is the short story “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl. This story is included first for several reasons. First, the author, Roald Dahl, will likely be familiar to students, as he has written many beloved children’s books such as *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The positive feelings that many students have towards these books and their film adaptations will likely make this short story an appealing first selection. Secondly, “The Landlady” is quite short and includes simple language and a suspenseful, fast-paced plot. This makes the story appropriate for 8th graders’ attention span and reading abilities. Thirdly, although the story is set in England, students from a variety of cultural backgrounds will be able to identify with the setting and cultural elements of the story.

The second selection in this unit is the poem “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe. This selection is placed second in the unit for a few reasons. This poem holds appeal for students partly because of its suspenseful elements and partly because it has been parodied and alluded to in much of popular culture. The language in this poem is more difficult than that in “The Landlady,” but the shortness of the poem makes “The Raven” appropriate for 8th grade students’ reading abilities and attention span. Some of the vocabulary used in “The Raven” will be unfamiliar to students, but can be easily understood with the help of a dictionary. The setting and style of this poem will also be foreign to students’ own cultural background, but the introductory

activity (in which students view part of a film version of the poem) will help students get a sense of the setting of the poem.

The third selection in this unit is the short story “The Monkey’s Paw” by W.W. Jacobs. This selection is placed third in the unit for a number of reasons. Longer in length than the first two selections, this short story is straightforward and has a suspenseful, quickly moving plot, making appropriate for 8th grade students’ reading levels and attention spans. Like “The Raven,” “The Monkey’s Paw” has been parodied and alluded to in many works of popular culture. Students who are unfamiliar with the story, will likely be familiar with the plot from one of its many adaptations. This familiarity, along with the premise of the plot (a monkey’s paw that can grant three wishes), will appeal to this group of students. Although this story was published in 1902, there is not much in the story that places it within a certain time period or place, making it easily relatable to students from various cultural backgrounds.

The fourth selection in this unit is Act I of Agatha Christie’s play *The Mousetrap*. This selection is fourth in the unit for a few reasons. First, it is longer in length than any of the four previous selections. As a play, the format and language may be more difficult for students to comprehend. Nevertheless, *The Mousetrap*, which has run continuously since it was first performed in 1952, is intriguing and comedic, offering much appeal for this group of students. Like the previous selections, this play is set in England in a past time period, but there is not much that reveals the setting and it will be easily understood by students from many cultural backgrounds.

The last selection in this unit is Chapters 1-3 of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. This selection is placed last in the unit for a number of reasons. This novel excerpt is longer than the four previous selections and contains more complex language

than the other selections. Like many of the other selections, students will be familiar with the character of Sherlock Holmes and may have seen a film or television adaptation of this novel. The mystery and supernatural elements of this novel excerpt will likely appeal to this group of students, despite the more difficult reading level. As with many of the other selections, this novel is set in England and may have some unfamiliar vocabulary, but the other appealing elements should engage readers.

The sub-topics of this unit are Horror Suspense (“The Landlady,” “The Raven,” and “The Monkey’s Paw”), Crime Suspense (*The Mousetrap*), and Mystery Suspense (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*). These sub-topics were initially chosen because they concretize the idea of suspense in ways that are familiar to students. 8th grade students may not fully understand the concept of suspense at the beginning of the unit, but they are undoubtedly familiar with the concepts of horror, crime and mystery. By exploring the topic of suspense through these familiar sub-topics, it is hoped that students will be better able to grasp the somewhat abstract idea of suspense. These sub-topics were chosen, secondly, because they appeal to young readers, particularly young teen boys. Many of the films, comic books, novels and video games that students this age enjoy are within the genres of horror, crime and mystery. By framing suspense through these enjoyed genres, it is hoped that the unit will appeal to this group of students. Lastly, the sub-topics of horror, crime and mystery were chosen because they are the most prominent genres in which suspense manifests. By reading selections from these three sub-topics, students will be better able to understand the similarities and differences among the three sub-topics and genre and will maintain a better understanding of how suspense functions in each.

All of the materials in this topical unit satisfy curricular objectives for 8th grade in the State of Michigan. These Common Core Standards are particularly emphasized in the unit:

RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text; RL.8.2 Determine a topic or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting and plot; provide an objective summary of the text; RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts; and RL.8.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Works Cited

Begley, Sharon. "Why Our Brains Love Horror Movies." *The Daily Beast*. Oct. 25, 2011. Web.

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CoreStandards.org. English Language Arts Standards: Reading: Literature: Grade 8. 2013. Web.

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Cypert, Rick. *The Virtue of Suspense: The Life and Works of Charlotte Armstrong*. Cranbury,

NJ: Associated University Press, 2008.

Objectives

Objectives

1. Students will identify the elements of suspense.
2. Students will identify what is scary, why it scares us and the role suspense plays in horror.
3. Students will identify the elements of horror and suspense in “The Landlady.”
4. Students will identify the role that foreshadowing plays in suspense.
5. Students will write a retelling of “The Landlady” to demonstrate knowledge of the elements of horror and suspense.
6. Students will identify and describe the mood, topics and main ideas of “The Raven.”
7. Students will identify elements of suspense within “The Raven.”
8. Students will compare and contrast film representations of “The Raven” with the original poem.
9. Students will compare and contrast the type of horror present in “The Raven” with the type of horror that is present in today’s works of literature and film.
10. Students will compare and contrast how the idea of fate and how it functions in the Twilight Zone episode “Mr. Denton on Doomsday” and “The Monkey’s Paw.”
11. Students will compare and contrast how suspense is achieved in “Mr. Denton on Doomsday,” the short story “The Monkey’s Paw,” and the short film “The Monkey’s Paw.”
12. Students will demonstrate understanding of the genre, topics and plot of “The Monkey’s Paw” by planning for a modern film retelling of the story.
13. Students will identify the characteristics of crime suspense by looking at and reading about crime comics.
14. Students will identify the elements of the crime genre and the elements of suspense in the play *The Mousetrap*.
15. Students will demonstrate understanding of *The Mousetrap* and the crime suspense genre by creating their own crime comics of *The Mousetrap*.
16. Students will identify the elements of the mystery suspense genre.
17. Students will identify how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle creates suspense in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

18. Students will compare and contrast how suspense is conveyed in written word and in spoken word.

19. Students will make inferences on plot based on what they know about the mystery suspense genre.

20. Students will demonstrate understanding of suspense by writing an essay using the elements of suspense and reflecting on the role of suspense in literature and their own lives.

“The Landlady”
by Roald Dahl

“The Raven”
by Edgar Allan Poe

“The Monkey’s Paw”
by W. W. Jacobs

The Mousetrap (Act I)
by Agatha Christie

The Hound of the Baskervilles
(Chapters 1-3)
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Supplementary Materials

Supplementary Materials

1. A short clip of a suspenseful scene from a film or television series, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*, or Brian DePalma's *Mission Impossible*.
2. Copies of a handout on suspense as a literary device [Figure 1]
3. A collection of scary stories, such as *Scary Stories to Tell In the Dark* by Alvin Schwartz
4. An image of a raven.
5. A YouTube clip of the trailer for the 2012 film *The Raven*, based on the poem. (Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PGDV1SWRkQ>)
6. A YouTube clip of *The Simpsons Tree House of Horror*, a modern day take on "The Raven" (Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlgQQgDhH7U>).
7. A YouTube clip of The Twilight Zone episode "Mr. Denton on Doomsday" (Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j99HrbC9wj0>).
8. A YouTube clip of Alfred Hitchcock's retelling of "The Monkey's Paw" (Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eEoQY3nx_E).
9. A Powerpoint presentation of images of crime comics found readily on the Internet.
10. Copies of the article "The Fall (And Rise) of the Comic Crime" by Brian Lindenmuth (Link: <http://www.mulhollandbooks.com/2010/12/14/a-history-of-and-appreciation-for-crime-comics/>).
11. A full-length film version of *The Mousetrap*.
12. A Powerpoint presentation of images that relate to both mysteries and the character Sherlock Holmes (these should include: a magnifying glass, a question mark, a trench coat and fedora, a pipe, a Sherlock Holmes hat, an image of the board game "Clue," etc...).
13. An audio recording of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Link: <http://librivox.org/the-hound-of-the-baskervilles-by-arthur-conan-doyle/>).
14. A clip of J.J. Abrams' TED talk "The mystery box" (Link: http://www.ted.com/talks/j_j_abrams_mystery_box.html).

Introductory Activity

Introductory Activity

1. Show students a clip of a very suspenseful scene from a film or television show, such as from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* or Brian DePalma's *Mission Impossible*. The more familiar students are with the clip, the better, as they will have a better understanding of context.
2. Next, ask students to define suspense. Write down their responses on a chalkboard or white board.
3. Distribute a handout on suspense [Figure 1]. Read the handout in class and discuss how the students' responses match up with the information on the handout.
4. Show the clip of the suspenseful scene once again, encouraging students to take notes.
5. Have students answer the following questions in their journal or notebook:
 - A. In a few sentences, briefly describe the suspenseful scene.
 - B. What made that scene so suspenseful? Be specific by giving three details.
 - C. What was going through your mind as you watched the scene?
 - D. How did the movie director slow down the moment of doubt?
 - E. What elements of suspense from the handout were present in this scene?
5. Have student share their responses with the entire class. Make sure to identify all of the elements of suspense within the scene if students have not done so.
6. Inform students that they will be beginning a unit on suspense. For homework, have them create a list of all the suspenseful films, television series and books they can think of.
7. Have students bring their lists of suspenseful films, television series and books to school the next day and discuss as an entire class.

Figure 1

Lesson Plan One
“The Landlady” by Roald Dahl

The Landlady” by Roald Dahl
Topic: Suspense
Sub-Topic: Horror Suspense

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will identify what is scary, why it scares us and the role suspense plays in horror.
2. Students will identify the elements of horror and suspense in “The Landlady.”
3. Students will identify the role that foreshadowing plays in suspense.
4. Students will write a retelling of “The Landlady” to demonstrate knowledge of the elements of horror and suspense.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

1. Bring in a collection of scary stories, such as *Scary Stories to Tell In the Dark* by Alvin Schwartz and read four or five stories aloud to the class.
2. Have students respond to the following in their journals or notebooks:
 - A. What does each main character fear the most?
 - B. What can we learn about human nature by locating the fears of characters?
 - C. What role does suspense play in these stories?
 - D. Is suspense necessary for a scary story?
3. As students to rank the stories by how scary they are in their journals or notebooks (4 stars for scariest, 1 star for least scariest).
4. As students rank the stories, have them list the things they considered scary about the story.
5. After the rankings are complete, have students work in groups to create a list of all the elements they found scary in the story.
6. As groups share their findings with the whole class, write the list down on large sheets of paper so it can be posted in the room and referred to later.

VOCABULARY

Tantalizing
Emanate
Rapacious
Conjure
Façade

Congenial
Lapse
Compel
Dithering
Porter

QUESTIONS

Content Questions

1. Who are the two main characters in the story?
2. What other characters are mentioned in the story?
3. How is the Landlady described?
4. What was Billy Weaver doing in the City of Bath?
5. He was directed to the 'Bell and Dragon' pub for accommodation. Why didn't he stay there?
6. What was strange about the landlady when he rang on the door bell?
7. What was Billy's first impression a) of the house and b) of the landlady?
8. How many other guests were there?
9. Why did the landlady ask him to go to the sitting-room after he'd unpacked his bag?
10. What did Billy find disturbing about the guest book?
11. When had the other guests checked in?
12. What was strange about the animals in the sitting-room?
13. What is the Landlady's hobby?
14. In what time of year is the story set?
15. At what time of day is the story set?
16. What does the Landlady remember about Mr. Mulholland and Mr. Temple?

Interpretation Questions

1. What do you think had happened to the other guests whose names Billy had seen?

2. Why do the other guests' names sound familiar to Billy?
3. How does the author achieve suspense in the story?
4. What elements of a scary story are present in "The Landlady"?
5. How does your impression of the Landlady change as you read the story?
6. What points in the story are most suspenseful?
7. Why does Billy's tea taste like almonds?
8. What do you think will happen to Billy?
9. What clues in the beginning of the story foreshadow the ending?

Application Questions

1. Did the scary stories we read in class change your expectations of what "The Landlady" would be like? In what ways is it different to those scary stories and what ways is "The Landlady" similar?
2. Have you ever met a stranger and had your first impression of this person change quickly?
3. Can you think of any examples from film, music or literature that tell share similar elements of "The Landlady"? How are they different?
4. Do you think the Landlady is a supernatural being (witch, etc...) or human? What clues from the text inform your answer? Which answer do you think is scarier and why?

Students will respond to the questions in their journals or notebooks. After they have individually responded, students will gather in the same groups from the introductory activity and share their responses.

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY

1. Write down the elements of a scary story from the introductory activity on slips of paper. Multiples are fine.
2. Have students put themselves into pairs and randomly pass out the elements so that each pair has two or three elements.

3. Have students compete to write the scariest story by retelling “The Landlady” using the elements of a scary story they have received, as well as what they have learned about suspense.
4. Provide students with a class session to write their stories and spend the next class session having Scary Story Hour. Turn off lights and have the pairs read their stories using flashlights.
5. After each pair has read their story, have the class vote on which story they thought was the scariest.
6. Lead the class in a discussion on why or why not the stories were successful at being scary.

Lesson Plan Two
“The Raven” by Edgar Allan
Poe

“The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe
Topic: Suspense
Sub-Topic: Horror Suspense

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will identify and describe the mood, topics and main ideas of “The Raven.”
2. Students will identify elements of suspense within “The Raven.”
3. Students will compare and contrast film representations of “The Raven” with the original poem.
4. Students will compare and contrast the type of horror present in “The Raven” with the type of horror that is present in today’s works of literature and film.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

1. Show students a photo of a raven and ask them to think of words they associate with the image.
2. Write the words on a blackboard or whiteboard.
3. Tell students they will be reading Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven,” but they will first watch a YouTube clip of the trailer for the 2012 film *The Raven*, based on the poem. (Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PGDV1SWRkQ>)
4. Have students create three columns in a notebook or on a piece of paper: Images in Trailer, Mood and Plot Possibilities. As they watch the trailer, have students fill out the columns, noting the images and mood in the trailer and making inferences on what the plot may be.
5. After students have completed filling out their columns, ask aloud the following questions and discuss as a class:
 - A. Based on the preview, what is the overall tone of the poem?
 - B. What image or images stand out for you and why?
 - C. What words come to mind after seeing the images and listening to the music in the preview?
 - D. What inferences can you make about the poem after seeing the preview?

VOCABULARY

Quaint
Lore
Surcease
Obeisance
Mien
Beguiling
Craven
Nepenthe
Tempest
Quaff

QUESTIONS

Content Questions

1. What is the setting of the poem?
2. What is the mood of the poem?
3. Who is the narrator of the poem?
4. Who is Lenore?
5. What happened to Lenore?
6. What is the narrator doing to forget his sorrows over losing Lenore?
7. What is the conflict in the poem?
8. What does the narrator first think of the raven?
9. What does the narrator order the raven to do in the second-to-last stanza?
10. What word does the speaker wish to be the last spoken between him and the bird?
11. Where does he tell the bird to go?
12. What does he tell the bird not to leave?
13. What words are repeated in the poem?
14. What images appear in the poem?
15. What does the narrator expect to find when he opens the door?

Interpretation Questions

1. How does Poe create mood in the opening stanza?
2. What do we know about the narrator?
3. Is there any indication the narrator may have dreamt the entire episode?
4. Why does the narrator repeat the lines “Tis some visitor entreating entrance”?
5. Why does the narrator say the word “Lenore”?
6. Why are some words in the poem repeated?
7. What is important about the title of the poem, "The Raven"? Why does Poe use this title?
8. What are the conflicts in the poem? What types of conflict (physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional) can you identify?
9. How does Edgar Allan Poe reveal character in the poem?
10. What are some topics? Symbols? How do they relate to the overall flow or meaning of the poem?
11. What is the central/primary purpose of the poem? Is the purpose important or meaningful?
12. How is madness or insanity explored in the poem?
13. Does the poem end the way you expected? How? Why?
14. How does Poe create suspense in the poem?
15. Why do you think Poe used a raven instead of another type of bird?
16. How do you think Lenore died?

Application Questions

1. Would you classify this poem as “horror”? In what ways is it different from today’s “horror” films and literature?
2. How essential is the setting? Could the poem have taken place in another place or time? What would the poem be like if took place today?

3. Have you ever felt paranoid or scared? Why?
4. Have you ever been in a similarly suspenseful situation? How did you feel at the time?
5. Now that you have read the poem, how successful do you think the trailer for the film *The Raven* was in capturing the mood and topics of the poem? Can you think of a film that perhaps better captures the poem's mood and topics?

Students will discuss the answers to the above questions in small groups of 4 or 5. After students have discussed their answers, the entire class will share their responses with each other.

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY

1. Show students a YouTube clip of *The Simpsons Tree House of Horror*, a modern day take on "The Raven" (Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlgQQgDhH7U>).
2. Have students discuss the following as a class:
 - A. Does the clip successfully represent the mood and plot of "The Raven"?
 - B. How is suspense achieved in this clip?
 - C. In what ways are the clip and the poem similar? Different?
 - D. How is "horror" conveyed in the clip and in the poem? Why do you think there might be a difference in "horror" from the time "The Raven" was written and now?

Lesson Plan Three
“The Monkey’s Paw” by
W.W. Jacobs

“The Monkey’s Paw” by W.W. Jacobs
Topic: Suspense
Sub-Topic: Horror Suspense

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will compare and contrast how the idea of fate and how it functions in the *Twilight Zone* episode “Mr. Denton on Doomsday” and “The Monkey’s Paw.”
2. Students will compare and contrast how suspense is achieved in “Mr. Denton on Doomsday,” the short story “The Monkey’s Paw,” and the short film “The Monkey’s Paw.”
3. Students will demonstrate understanding of the genre, topics and plot of “The Monkey’s Paw” by planning for a modern film retelling of the story.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

1. Lead students in a discussion about fate. Ask the following questions:

- A. What is fate?
- B. Do you believe in fate?
- C. Would you describe any occurrences or events in your life as a result of fate?

2. Show students the *Twilight Zone* episode “Mr. Denton on Doomsday,” which features the character of Henry J. Fate who intervenes in the affairs of Denton, a former expert gunman but now alcoholic (Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j99HrbC9wj0>). After viewing, ask the following questions:

- A. What is the dilemma in this clip?
- B. Who is Henry J. Fate?
- C. What does Fate offer Denton?
- D. How is the conflict resolved?
- E. Is Denton better off in the end? What about Pete Grant?
- F. How does the idea of fate function in this clip?
- G. How is suspense achieved in this clip?

VOCABULARY

Betoken
Bibulous
Broach
Condole
Doughty
Fakir
Fusillade
Malign
Prosaic
Rubicund

QUESTIONS

Content Questions

1. What type of mood is established in the beginning of the story? What helps determine that sense of feeling?
2. What magical ability does the monkey's paw have?
3. Why did the fakir place a spell on the paw?
4. What was the first man's third wish? How might this be an example of foreshadowing?
5. Why doesn't Mr. White know what to wish for? What is Mr. White's first wish?
6. What does the paw immediately do after the first wish?
7. What does Mr. White see in the fire the night of his first wish? How is this an example of foreshadowing?
8. What are the family's feelings about the wish in the morning?
9. How do the Whites come to receive the \$200?
10. Why does Mrs. White want the monkey's paw?
11. What is the second wish?
12. At what time of day does the story begin? Compare the weather outside with the atmosphere inside the parlor.

13. What does Morris do with the paw after telling about its background? What does Mr. White immediately do?

14. What is Mr. White's first wish? What happens after he makes it? What is his second wish?

15. Summarize what happens after Mr. White makes the second wish.

16. How does Morris feel about the paw?

Interpretation Questions

1. Sergeant-Major Morris' face whitens when he reveals that he has had three wishes. What can you infer about the paw?

2. What is probably upsetting the sergeant-major about the White family's lightheartedness toward the paw?

3. How does the quote "Be careful what you wish for, you may receive it," give the reader an idea about what may happen in the story?

4. How does the setting impact the story?

5. How does the setting change at the beginning of Part II? How does this impact the mood of the story?

6. What is meant by the word *fate*? Tell what the visitor says about fate. Did the Whites interfere with fate? Explain.

7. Captain Morris tells his friend to make wishes sensibly. Why? Are Mr. White's wishes sensible? Explain. What alternatives did Mr. White have?

8. What techniques does the author use to create suspense?

9. What do you suppose was the final wish?

10. What do you think happened at the end of the story? What does he mean when Mr. White begs his wife not to let "it" into the house? What is he afraid of? Who or what was outside of the house?

11. What are the conflicts in "The Monkey's Paw"? What types of conflict (physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional) did you notice in this story?

12. What is important about the title?

13. How does the author reveal character in "The Monkey's Paw"?
14. What are some topics in the story? How do they relate to the plot and characters?
15. What are some symbols in "The Monkey's Paw"? How do they relate to the plot and characters?
16. Are the characters consistent in their actions? Are they fully developed characters? How? Why?
17. What is the central/primary purpose of the story? Is the purpose important or meaningful?
18. Why is this story usually considered a work of supernatural fiction?
19. How essential is the setting to the story? Could the story have taken place anywhere else?
20. What is the role of women in the text? How are mothers represented?

Application Questions

1. Do you find the characters likable? Are the characters persons you would want to meet?
2. Does the story end the way you expected? How? Why?
3. Do you think Mr. White's second wish came true? We never *see* an undead version of Herbert in the story, we only hear someone knocking on the White's door. Can you think of any other explanation for the sound?
4. If you were in Mr. and Mrs. White's position, would you wish for Herbert to come back to life? Why or why not?
5. Is Morris an untrustworthy guy? Is he trying to make Mr. White want the cursed paw?
6. How does "The Monkey's Paw" compare to other stories about wishes that you've read or watched? (Maybe *Aladdin*, the Greek myth of "Apollo and Daphne, or *Coraline*, for example.)
7. How does the idea of fate in "The Monkey's Paw" compare to the idea of fate in "Mr. Denton on Doomsday"?

Students are to write down their responses to the Content and Interpretation Questions in their journals. Students will meet in groups of 4 or 5 to discuss the Application Questions.

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY

1. Explain to students that, as discussed with the “The Raven” lesson, horror and suspense manifest differently in different time periods and in different media. Alfred Hitchcock directed a short retelling of “The Monkey’s Paw” in 1965, which will be viewed by the class. (Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eEoQY3nx_E).

2. As students view the short film, they are to take notes on:

A. How Hitchcock achieves suspense in the short film

B. How this suspense compares to the suspense methods of the short story. Is it scarier? More obviously suspenseful?

C. Why do you think Hitchcock updated or made the changes he did?

D. Does Hitchcock’s version stay true to the original story?

3. Tell students that “The Monkey’s Paw” helped horror-master Stephen King develop some of the plot elements and major topics that would win him a worldwide audience. Ask students to get back into their discussion groups and plan a modern retelling of “The Monkey’s Paw.” Have students consider the following:

A. Where would the film take place?

B. Who would the main characters be?

C. What would the main characters wish for?

D. How would you achieve suspense?

4. Have students create a poster for their groups movie and present their ideas to the class.

5. Have the class vote on which movie idea sounds the scariest or most suspenseful.

Lesson Plan Four
The Mousetrap by Agatha
Christie

***The Mousetrap* (Act I) by Agatha Christie**
Topic: Suspense
Sub-Topic: Crime Suspense

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will identify the characteristics of crime suspense by looking at and reading about crime comics
2. Students will identify the elements of the crime genre and the elements of suspense in the play *The Mousetrap*.
3. Students will demonstrate understanding of *The Mousetrap* and the crime suspense genre by creating their own crime comics of *The Mousetrap*.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

1. Show students a slideshow of images of crime comics (such as *Dick Tracy*).
2. Brainstorm, as a class, what they think of when they see these images. Ask the following questions:
 - A. Why are we so interested in crime stories? What is the appeal?
 - B. How are these stories told (they typically begin with a crime and then the identity of the criminal is discovered at the end of the story).
 - C. What role does suspense play in crime stories?
 - D. What are some other genres or media that use a crime story (Examples could include true crime TV shows such as *Law and Order* or kids cartoons such as *Scooby Doo*).
3. Hand out copies of the article “The Fall (And Rise) of the Comic Crime” by Brian Lindenmuth (Link: <http://www.mulhollandbooks.com/2010/12/14/a-history-of-and-appreciation-for-crime-comics/>). Read the article as a class and have students answer the following questions:
 - A. How did the Comics Code regulate crime comics content?
 - B. What issues do modern crime comics deal with?
 - C. How are crime stories different from mysteries?

VOCABULARY

Brute
Coke

Mugs
Refectory
Neurotic
Bedrock
Macabre
Haphazard
Chillblains

QUESTIONS
Content Questions

1. What is the setting of the play?
2. What song is played at the beginning of the play?
3. Who is Mrs. Maureen Lyon?
4. Who is Mollie Ralston? How is she described?
5. Who is Giles? What is his relation to Mollie?
6. In what time of year does the play take place?
7. How did Giles and Mollie come to live in their house?
8. Why are people staying with Giles and Mollie?
9. Who is Christopher Wren? How is he described?
10. Who is Mrs. Boyle? How is she described?
11. Who is Major Metcalf? How is he described?
12. Who is Miss Casewell? How is she described?
13. What crime takes place near Paddington?
14. Who is Paravicini? How is he described?
15. What did Mrs. Boyle expect from Monkswell Manor Guest House?
16. Who is Detective Trotter? Why does he come to the house?
17. Who is killed at the end of Act I?

Interpretation Questions

1. What is the significance of the play's title?
2. What is the significance of "Three Blind Mice" being played at the beginning of the play?
3. What other nursery rhymes are featured or alluded to? Why do you think this is?
4. How does Christie achieve suspense in the play?
5. How do the characters relate to each other in the first act of the play? Are there any hostilities or tensions? Why?
6. What foreshadowing can you detect in Act I?
7. Who do you think is the murderer? Why?
8. What evidence do you see of double identities or masked identities in Act I?
9. Why do you think Christie chose to have the play take place during a blizzard?
10. What is the general mood of Act I?

Application Questions

1. How is *The Mousetrap* different in tone or style from the crime comics discussed in the Introductory Activity? Who do you think the primary audience for this play is? Who do you think the primary audience for crime comics is?
2. Have you ever experienced being suspicious of the people you are with? Were the people strangers, peers or closer friends or family? Did you act on your suspicions?
3. Can you think of any other examples from film or literature that allude to nursery rhymes?
4. Christie's plays and stories are often called "whodunnit's" because they focus around solving a crime (Who has "done it"). Can you think of other examples of whodunits from film, television or literature?

The questions will be discussed in groups of three or four students. Once the groups have discussed their responses to the questions, the entire class will convene to discuss the questions together.

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY

1. Show students a film version of *The Mousetrap* so that they can view the entirety of the plot.
2. Have students take notes while viewing, highlighting important plot points and characters.
3. Students will break into pairs and design their own crime comic for one act of *The Mousetrap*. Provide copies of the entire play as well as the images used in the Introductory Activity for guidance.
4. Provide students with ample class time to plan, draft and create their comics.
5. Once students have completed their comics, hold a Comic Day in class where students can read each other's work.

Lesson Plan Five
The Hound of the Baskervilles
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

***The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Excerpt of Chapters 1-3) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**
Topic: Suspense
Sub-Topic: Mystery Suspense

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will identify the elements of the mystery suspense genre.
2. Students will identify how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle creates suspense in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.
3. Students will compare and contrast how suspense is conveyed in written word and in spoken word.
4. Students will make inferences on plot based on what they know about the mystery suspense genre.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

1. Show students a variety of images that relate to both mysteries and the character Sherlock Holmes (these should include: a magnifying glass, a question mark, a trench coat and fedora, a pipe, a Sherlock Holmes hat, an image of the board game "Clue," etc...).
2. Students should be able to make the connection that these images relate to mysteries. Ask students *why* these images represent mysteries.
3. Ask students to think about their favorite mystery story from a book, television or movie.
4. Have students reflect on the following questions in their notebook or journal:
 - A. Why do people like to read mystery and detective stories? List as many reasons as you can. Does the fact that detective stories have a predictable structure make them more or less enjoyable to read? Why?
 - B. Does the mystery's predictable structure take away from its element of suspense? Why or why not?
 - C. Why do many readers consider relaxing with mystery a "guilty pleasure"? What is the difference between "serious literature" and mystery stories?
5. Ask students to keep their responses in mind as they read and respond to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

VOCABULARY

Bulbous

Luminous
Piqued
Amiable
Wanton
Yeoman
Bewailing
Spectral
Infirm

QUESTIONS

Content Questions

1. Who is the narrator in Chapter 1?
2. From what object did Holmes and Watson learn about James Mortimer? What clues did it provide?
3. What did Holmes deduce from the clues on the object?
4. How did Mortimer inadvertently insult Holmes?
5. What was Mortimer's relationship with Charles Baskerville?
6. What did the manuscript dated 1742 say?
7. What were the circumstances of Charles Baskerville's death?
8. Who were Charles Baskerville's next of kin?
9. What were the "private facts" Mortimer told Holmes?
10. Why had no one else seen the footprints of the hound?
11. Describe the creature on the moor that several people has seen prior to Charles Baskerville's death.
12. What did Mortimer want of Holmes in Chapter 3?
13. Who were Charles Baskerville's other family members?
14. What advice did Holmes give Mortimer in Chapter 3?
15. What was Holmes' theory about Charles Baskerville's death in Chapter 3?
16. Who is Hugo Baskerville?

Interpretation Questions

1. What secrets could the people at Baskerville Hall have? Why?
2. Why could Henry Baskerville be in danger?
3. How is atmosphere set early on in Chapter 1?
4. Why do you think Doyle choose Watson to narrate the story rather than Holmes?
5. Why does Holmes get involved in this case?
6. What is the role of the supernatural in this story?
7. How would you describe the language of Watson and Holmes?
8. How would you describe the character of Watson?
9. How would you describe the character of Holmes?
10. How does Doyle create suspense in the first three chapters of the book?
11. What do you think is the significance of the moors?
12. How does the book's dialogue help create suspense?

Application Questions

1. Does your family have any legends or tales that have been passed down through generations, such as the Baskervilles?
2. What did you learn about detective work in the first three chapters of the book?
3. What elements from the first three chapters of the book do you think are typical of the mystery genre? Have you seen these elements in other works of literature or film?
4. What do you make of the supernatural elements of the story? Do you believe that the Baskervilles were cursed? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think some people prefer to believe in the supernatural while others prefer to trust science? Which do you prefer to put your faith in?
6. Think of some of your favorite mystery stories. Do you prefer ones with a scientific explanation or a supernatural explanation? Why?

Have students write down their responses to the questions in their journals or notebooks. Break students into pairs and have them share their responses with each other. Have the entire class convene and share their responses.

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY

1. Have students listen to an audio recording (such as the one found here: <http://librivox.org/the-hound-of-the-baskervilles-by-arthur-conan-doyle/>) of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* so that they can find out what happens at the end of the book.
2. Have students make predictions at the end of each chapter in their journal as to what will happen next. Have them note every moment of suspense and how it is conveyed through the audio recording (for example: pauses, accelerated speaking, or intensifying music).
3. After viewing, have students respond to one of the two following questions:
 - A. What would Sherlock Holmes think about the kind of detectives we are most familiar with from American television? Pretend you are Holmes and watch an episode of a series such as *Law and Order*, *NYPD Blue*, or *CSI* that features a contemporary American detective. If Holmes were asked to give them advice on detecting, what would he tell them?
 - B. What real-life mysteries might make thrilling movies? Look through today's newspapers and history books and compile a list of murders and other dramatic crimes from the past or present that have never been turned into films. Then write the one-page pitch that would convince Hollywood to "green light" your project. Include in your pitch the actors who would be best cast in each role.

Culminating Activity

Culminating Activity

1. Show the class producer, screenwriter and director J.J. Abrams' TED talk "The mystery box," in which he describes the use of mystery and suspense in his work and how it can be traced back to a personal story from his childhood (Link:

http://www.ted.com/talks/j_j_abrams_mystery_box.html)

2. After watching the video, have students reflect on the following questions:

A. How did suspense play a role in J.J. Abrams' personal life?

B. How did this lead to his lifelong fascination with suspense and mystery?

C. Why do you think J.J. Abrams has never opened the mystery box?

C. How have you experienced suspense in your own personal life?

3. After students have had time to reflect on the questions, explain to the class that suspense not only exists in the genres of crime, mystery and horror, but also in every day life. Ask for suggestions of how suspense is carried out in daily life (such as waiting for a new video game, opening presents on holidays, or waiting for a text message from a crush).

4. Provide students with two days to write a personal essay on suspense in their own lives. Have students follow these guidelines:

A. The essay must contain the elements of suspense we have discussed in class (that is, it must be suspenseful!)

B. The essay should convey the student's knowledge of the use of suspense in crime, mystery and horror.

C. Students should address how literary and personal suspense are similar and how they are different.

5. Have students read their essays to the class and follow with a discussion on which essays were the most suspenseful and why.