

# MURDER MYSTERY LESSON PLAN

## Implementation, Tips, & Tricks

HISTORY & SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSES | HIGH SCHOOL | BEGINNING-OF-THE-YEAR | 2-3 DAY LESSON

### SUMMARY & PURPOSE

This beginning-of-the-year lesson simultaneously introduces students to historical thinking skills using murder mysteries investigations and facilitates the development of cohesive classroom communities through collaboration and group work. At the end of the lesson, students will directly compare the skills utilized in solving their murder mystery with the skills used by historians and social scientists using infographics, charts, and discussions.

### REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Murder Mystery Game (Self-Developed or Purchased) with materials (& Copies)
- Detectives Notes
- Presentation Materials (e.g. Screen or Projector)
- Thinking Skills Posters/Handouts

### OBJECTIVES

Students will **UNDERSTAND** that -

1. Studying history and the social sciences helps develop critical thinking and transferrable skills useful in limitless contexts.
2. Narratives of past events are complex and often conflicting, often influenced by bias, perspective, and point-of-view.

Students will **KNOW** -

1. Transferrable skills utilized by historians and social scientists, including source, bias, context, periodization, testimony, evidence, and argument/hypothesis.
2. Important terminology, including primary source, secondary source, text, artifact, and chronology.

Students will **BE ABLE TO** -

1. **Cite** specific evidence from various sources to support historical analysis of textual and artifact evidence. (**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.1**)
2. **Determine/Decode** the meaning of symbols, key terms, and technical (discipline-specific) terminology. (**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.4**)
3. **Summarize** the main ideas from and conclusions of textual and artifact evidence to form hypotheses/arguments. (**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.2**)
4. **Evaluate** various sources for bias, point-of-view, key information, perspective, voice, purpose, and gaps to address questions, verify information, and/or solve problems (**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.7 & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.8**)
5. **Integrate** sources to verify data, organize information and hypotheses, and corroborate or challenge conclusions. (**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.7 & CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.8**)
6. **Synthesize** information from various sources to form a coherent and nuanced understanding of processes, concepts, and ideas. (**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.11-12.9**)

## SETUP & ORGANIZATION

- **Create/purchase a murder mystery game that is appropriate to students' ability and readiness levels.**
  - Ensure that you have organized all in-game materials and have made enough copies for individual students and/or groups of students.
  - You can create a murder mystery from scratch or you can purchase a pre-made version from a variety of venues. *An old Clue game could work with some modifications.*
  - Prepare and provide students with copies of all materials (evidence and artifacts). *Items that cannot be copied or duplicated should be curated in a central area where all students and groups have access. Provide ample time for students to examine and reexamine those materials.*
- **Tell students the rules and gameplay instructions without revealing too much about the purpose of the activity. Let students draw their own conclusions.**
  - Provide "Detective Notebook" handouts or a similar physical record, where students can record their observations, hypotheses, and ideas. You can give a little bit of the information away here. *This is a great place to introduce "means," "motive," and "opportunity." -- This is provided as part of most pre-purchased games but should be added when developing your own versions.*
  - Explicitly tell students how they should use their notebooks/pages. However, do not reveal too much information. *A helpful tip is to work through one or two of the early clues with the class to demonstrate good detective note-taking skills. You can also use this time to ask some spoiler-free rhetorical questions (e.g., how does Testimony A differ from Testimony B? Why might their narratives have differences? Why is this important to consider?). Be the judge of how much information your students need in context.*
- **Take a more passive role while students work (in small groups AND large groups) to work through the materials.**
  - Chime in to keep students on task and answer general questions (without revealing too much). *Use this time to take detailed notes about how students respond to the tasks, the materials, and each other. Who is leading? Who is more passive? Who is struggling with the expectations? Use this data as part of a pre-assessment.*
  - It is helpful to have a central note-taking hub for all students to see. Use this in your check-ins, and make sure to include any helpful information you feel would help students (scaffold as necessary).
- **Provide periodic check-ins where you ask more pointed (but with some vagueness) questions about students' notes, ideas, hypotheses, and evidence.**
  - This is a great way to keep students on task, check in with learners to differentiate and scaffold, and keep the pace moving (if you have more limited time).
- **Bring the activity to a close when students are ready to provide their final arguments backed by evidence.**
  - This will look different based on your initial setup. You might have groups provide their arguments and have the class determine which argument is best supported by evidence. You could require groups to come to a consensus before this section, or you could allow each group to present their reasoning and immediately reveal the answer. *The key is to focus on the "why" and "how you know."*
- **Closeout game-play by reading the mystery's conclusion and congratulating students on their success or discussing how they may have missed the mark.**
  - At this point in the lesson, you should begin emphasizing the "why" of this activity. Why did you prepare and implement this activity? Why might this be useful in our class? *Develop your own questions based on your students' responses and scaffold as necessary.*

## SETUP & ORGANIZATION (CONTINUED)

- **Transition the class into a more formal introduction of history and social science skills using materials you have prepared.**
  - Organizing your class discussion may take any format you prefer. *You might find it useful to transition into a more direct, lecture-based discussion of historians' skills by using a Slide Deck. Alternatively, you might want to continue your class discussion in a more informal format. I recommend preparing for multiple scenarios and deciding which to implement based on individual class circumstances, participation, and readiness.* I have enclosed some infographics that highlight key historical thinking skills for your reference
- **Provide handouts that summarize the main purpose and takeaways from your lesson.**
  - You can provide physical handouts, provide cloze notes, or have students practice their note-taking skills from scratch. However, you should always provide some formal handout or graphic for students to easily reference throughout the year. *Regularly revisit these graphics and review your discussions about this activity to make stronger connections with and among your students.*

### [GOOGLE DRIVE FOLDER LINK](#)

Check For Periodic Updates & New Resources

## In-Lesson Teacher Observations & Reflection Section