

WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? WHY?

Stories of Mystery and Intrigue

Crammed with clues, and packed with enough twists and turns in the plot to keep them guessing, there is nothing like a good mystery to keep young readers engaged and challenged. And while you have their attention, a good whodunit would be a compelling way to focus on questioning as an effective reading strategy!

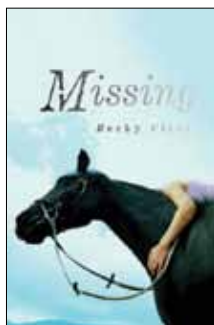
In this issue we are highlighting a number of mystery titles. While the protagonists range in age and gender, the story lines are all intriguing and deal with issues that kids can relate to. There are, of course, many other excellent books available in this genre. Here are just a couple more:

- *The Source of Light* by David Richards, Thistle Down Press, 2011
- *The Haunting of Amos Manor* by Richard Stevenson, Magpie Books, 2011

Reading Comprehension Strategy: Asking Questions

Good readers ask questions when they wonder about the story before, during and after reading it. When talking to students about questioning it is important to emphasize that:

1. Asking and answering questions helps the reader to better understand the text.
2. Some questions are easy to answer because the information is right in the text.
3. Some questions require a lot of thinking because the answer is not in the book. These questions:
 - often do not have one right answer
 - make the reader think outside of the story
 - often create more questions for the reader
4. Some useful question words are: who, what, where, when, why, how, would, is, should, if, did, do, are, does, doesn't, can, can't, could, couldn't.



Missing

by Becky Citra
Orca Book Publishers, 2011
ISBN 978-1-55469-345-0 (pb)
\$9.95, 179 pp, ages 9 – 14
www.orcabook.com

After the death of her mother, Thea and her dad find themselves constantly drifting from one small town to another in the Cariboo district of British Columbia. Trying to run away from their pain, they never stay long and so never have time for friendships. But then her

father takes a job renovating a ranch. Here, Thea encounters an abused horse which she tries to rehabilitate. She stumbles upon an old story about the disappearance of a four-year-old girl who was never heard from again. She works with a local boy, Van, to find out what really happened. As they uncover that story and face some disturbing episodes, Thea starts to finally come to terms with her own losses.

Reading this first person narrative, I became truly enthralled. Becky Citra's thirty years' experience of ranch life and horses shines as does her powerful writing. The descriptions engage the senses. The pacing will keep the targeted readers out of breath as they quickly turn the pages to find out what happens next. The characters are engaging and alive. And who does not have troubles that they wish they could run away from?

Classroom Connections: This well-structured mystery is a good choice for examining techniques such as foreshadowing in the "whodunit" genre as well as the many strategies used in reading such as predicting, asking questions, connecting the text to the world, visualizing the story, inferring from the clues gathered. Related topics include horses, family secrets and sibling rivalry. [Review by Mary Moroska.]



Theodore Boone: the abduction

by John Grisham
Penguin, 2011
ISBN 978-0-525-42557-1
\$19.50, 272 pp, ages 10 – 13
www.penguin.com/youngreaders

John Grisham's name is legendary in the publishing world. He has written twenty-three novels, one work of non-fiction and one collection of short stories. Since 1988, all his books have become international bestsellers. He

is best known for his legal thrillers, and *Theodore Boone: the abduction* is the second novel of this genre that he has written for young readers.

Thirteen year old Theodore Boon is the only child of two lawyers. They live in the small town of Strattenburg. Theodore is knowledgeable about the law, is well liked by adults and his peers and has a reputation for solving small legal issues (like rescuing dogs from the pound). When Theodore's best friend April disappears from her home in the middle of the night, the town is gripped with fear. The police chase down several false leads but after several days no progress has been made in locating her. Everyone fears the worst. Theodore and his friend Chase apply their investigative skills to the problem and eventually succeed in locating her in Virginia. With his parents out of town, Theodore turns to his Uncle Ike for help and they are able to travel through the night to bring April home.

Classroom Connections: The abrupt writing style gives this book the feel of an old detective novel—perhaps something like an edgier Hardy Boy's story. Although it takes place in the United States it does supply some general information about the legal system in a kid-friendly way. April's increasingly dysfunctional home life also provides a platform for a discussion around issues of support for children in crisis. Any student who enjoys suspense (violence free) stories or enjoys unravelling puzzles and mysteries would like this book. As with other books of this genre, it also provides teachers with an opportunity to focus on questioning as an effective reading strategy. [Review by Brenda Boreham.]

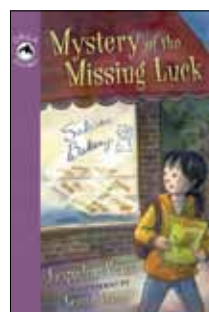


Max Finder Mystery Collected Casebook, Volume 5

by Craig Battle
illustrated by Ramón Pérez, created by Liam O'Donnell
Owlkids Publishing, 2011
ISBN 978-1-926818-12-2 (pb)
\$11.95, 96 pp, ages 8+
www.owlkids.com

This graphic novel is the fifth instalment of the popular and award-winning series that was originally published in OWL Magazine. Max Finder and his friends from Central Meadows Junior High School team up to solve ten cases. Included in this volume are two new stories, an article on "How to be a Detective" and a short interview with the creators. Each case is presented in four to six pages that feature full colour illustrations, and the solution with an explanation follows. Things like graffiti on the walls, sabotage of a school show try-out, the disappearance of exam answer sheets and bullies are all life experiences of the intended audience and so these cases will be familiar. Max Finder mysteries are popular in my schools and I bet in yours as well.

Classroom Connections: Graphic novels are a wonderful way to introduce visual literacy. The pictures are still and the reader can take all the time necessary to focus on details. But to solve these mysteries, the reader must also look for clues in the dialogue bubbles and text boxes. Attention to detail is definitely a skill that is reinforced here. For the teacher, there are tips on how to use *Max Finder* in the classroom with an emphasis on reluctant reader strategies. [Review by Mary Moroska.]



Mystery of the Missing Luck

by Jacqueline Pearce
illustrations by Leanne Franson
Series: Orca Echoes
Orca Book Publishers, 2011
ISBN 978-1-55469-396-2 (pb)
\$6.95, 61 pp, ages 7 – 9
www.orcabook.com

Why is business not going well at Sara's grandmother's bakery? Could it be because it has lost Maneki Neko, the cat statue with the raised paw that is said to attract customers and good fortune? Sara wants to help her grandmother, and when one night a mysterious cat appears, she and her friend Jake work out a plan that might help them find the statue and restore the bakery's lost luck.

This is a wonderfully warm and clever book that will captivate the target audience. The chapters are short and fast-paced. There is suspense or mystery with a hint of magic. (Was it or was it not magic? After all, this age group still wants to believe in magic.) The manga style pen and ink illustration adds another initiation layer. The story is a great introduction to many facets of Japanese culture, and the pictures reinforce the sense of immersion. Well done!

Classroom Connections: This is an interesting introduction to both the Japanese culture (and by extension, other Asian cultures as well) and to the mystery genre in literature. Other good topics for discussion would be what brings luck, what are superstitions, favourite foods in the various cultures represented in the classroom, and of course, grandparents. [Review by Mary Moroska.]



The Mystery of the Cyber Bully

by Marty Chan
ThistleDown Press, 2010
ISBN 978-1-897235-82-9
\$10.95, 215 pp, ages 8 – 11
www.thistleDownpress.com

What school-aged child doesn't know about bullies and bullying? This is an action-packed mystery aimed at younger readers with a focus on the emergence of bullying through the perceived anonymity of the Internet. It is filled with metaphors and similes,

allowing children to create vivid images of the story in their mind making the answer to the mystery itself the only struggle throughout the book.

Marty, Remi and Trina are three friends who are well known in the grade six class for solving mysteries. The trio work together—armed with their friendship, walkie-talkies and sleuthing skills—each contributing their unique gifts to solve the mystery of the cyber bully. It begins with just one student in the class, then suddenly it seems as though everyone is the target of emails, messages or online posts aiming to embarrass or hurt them. Samantha is picked on because of her fashion, Mikayla because of her social life, Nathan, his karate skills. No one is safe.

This book brings awareness to bullying, as Marty says, "Bullies don't need a reason. They need victims." (p. 54). The book is also useful for introducing the dangers of the Internet and helping kids understand how to get help if they know that someone is being bullied online: "Cyber bullies pick on their victims through the Internet. At least with a real bully, you were safe at home. With cyber bullies, home was the worst place to be, unless you didn't have a computer, because they could send you messages anywhere and at any time. Often, they hid their identities. Some kids believed this was because schools had strict no cyber-bullying policies, but I believed it was because cyber bullies were cowards." (p. 52)

Classroom Connections: This is an excellent short text to open discussions on Internet safety, character education (including social groupings, good friends and bad friends) and anti-bullying strategies and would make a great novel study before November's Bullying Awareness and Prevention weeks. You could also use this book to investigate dialogue in reading and writing as well as using similes and metaphors (especially around April for poetry month). Reading Comprehension Strategies: Making Predictions, Inferring, Visualizing. [Review by Amanda Parker.]



Old Photographs

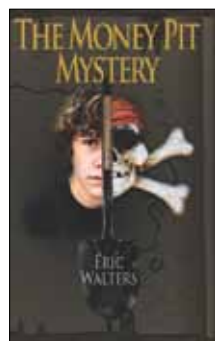
by Sherie Posesorski
Second Story Press, 2010
ISBN 978-1-897187-78-4
\$10.95, 224 pp, ages 13 – 18
www.secondstorypress.ca

The summer is dragging by slowly. To avoid the tensions at home Phoebe spends her days riding her bike, reading and texting her new friend Yuri who is spending the summer in Tokyo. Phoebe is bored and her sense of isolation grows by the day. She has spent the last school year in a new city and with a new stepdad, separated from her

old friends and family members. To help escape her loneliness, Phoebe, with Yuri's encouragement, is reading through the Agatha Christie series of detective novels.

One day while riding her bike along the Tour de France route, Phoebe stops at a garage sale. She ends up spending the day helping Mrs. Tomblin—a sweet but confused older woman. When a few days later the house is broken into and Mrs. Tomblin is robbed and hurt, Phoebe takes it upon herself to watch out after her elderly friend and to solve the mystery of the robbery.

Classroom Connections: Could Mrs. Tomblin's collection of old photographs be the motive for the robbery? Why was Mrs. Tomblin's son Richard harassing her to sign the insurance claims forms? Just how vulnerable are people with Alzheimer's in our society? What supports are available for people like her? These are just a few of the many questions that arise while reading this novel, making it a great choice for literature circle discussions and the teaching of questioning and inferring as two powerful reading strategies. [Review by Brenda Boreham.]



The Money Pit Mystery

by Eric Walters
Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2011
ISBN 978-1-55455-123-1
\$9.95, 289 pp, ages 8 – 14
www.fitzhenry.ca

Eric Walters has created a wonderful and powerful novel combining the thrill of a treasure hunt with the difficulties of family dynamics. Being the annoying younger brother, Sam is frustrated that his sister pays no attention to him and his passion for magic. Sam doesn't understand Beth's interest in boys and is annoyed that he has to fight with her for

attention from Buzz, their island friend. To complicate matters more, their grandfather is becoming more and more forgetful, to the point where the local doctor thinks he may be developing Alzheimer's and takes away his driver's license. It's enough for the whole family to worry about!

But at the heart of it all is where their grandfather has been spending all his time and money—at the Money Pit, where rumours have it Captain Kidd's treasure is buried. Also, his house is filled with more than a dozen cats and his bills have been unpaid for years—since the time their mother had a fight with him and stopped their yearly visits. Sam and Beth are worried for their grandfather but they're also excited to be back on the island, back with their grandfather, and back treasure hunting. Their energy and enthusiasm to solve the mystery of the Money Pit overshadow the hardship of the family troubles. As with all good mystery stories, it all works out in the end. This is a great novel for older children and younger adolescents as it spans a range of interests from magic tricks and treasure hunting to dating and family troubles. A great read all around—and a great mystery, too!

Classroom Connections: Great for a classroom library or as a read-aloud. Not as focussed for literature circles as its strengths lie in the vivid imagery and the suspense of the mystery. A great text for encouraging students to make connections and to initiate classroom discussions about aging grandparents, family difficulties, and the importance of balancing personal goals and dreams with the day-to-day responsibilities in life. [Review by Amanda Parker.]



Case Files 40 Murders and Mysteries Solved by Science

by Larry Verstraete
Scholastic, 2011
ISBN 978-1-4431-0000-7 (sc)
\$7.99, 149 pp, glossary, index, ages 9 – 12
www.scholastic.ca

Workers digging a ditch discover the skeleton of a girl wrapped in a carpet. Who is this nameless person? Can she be **identified**?

A boy is viciously murdered. Other than an oily smear on his jacket, there is little evidence at the scene. Can an oily stain **prove** who committed the murder?

Weathered bones are discovered buried in a field. There are two bodies, but the lower limbs are intertwined in a strange way and the lower legs of one are missing entirely. What happened to these two people? What is the **explanation**?

A painting is up for sale. Some say it is a masterpiece. Others claim that it is a clever forgery. Which is it? Can the controversy be **resolved**?

Case Files is an intriguing book filled with mysteries that have all been solved by careful investigation and scientific knowledge. It is organized into four chapters with each one focussing on a particular goal of science detection: identify, prove, explain and resolve. The branches of science that are involved in the investigative work include entomology, geology, archeology, anthropology, chemistry and physics.

Classroom Connections: The high interest level of the case studies and stories, combined with the book's many features of non-fiction text (sidebars, lots of curious photographs, captions, glossary, index, etc.) are a winning combination. This book would be useful in any mid grade classroom that was engaged in the study of non-fiction text. Paired with a good selection of mystery stories and novels it would also be a good choice for literature circles. [Review by Brenda Boreham.]

REVIEWERS

Brenda Boreham Helping young students to discover the magic of reading has been one of the most satisfying aspects of Brenda's teaching career.

Mary Moroska has been a teacher and a school librarian in French Immersion schools in Montreal for over 30 years.

Amanda Parker loves reading and learning and shares this with her classes. She is currently an intermediate teacher with the London District Catholic School Board.

Interested in reviewing? Contact: dmumford@CanadianTeacherMagazine.com