4th Grade Language Arts Unit: Mysteries

I. Framework for Language Arts

Knowledge of Students
(Section removed for privacy reasons).

Knowledge of Pedagogy
Our students get several doses of spelling and grammar practice every week. On Mondays there is a spelling pre-test and a mini-lesson on a grammar or spelling skill. The Monday night homework is a corresponding spelling practice sheet, and then on Friday the students take a spelling test that includes the skill for the week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the students have five sentences in which they must fix the spelling, grammar and punctuation errors (Daily Oral Language). On Friday there is a small quiz with multiple choice and a paragraph that has errors to be corrected.

At the beginning of the year the students were introduced to Literature Circles. My CT modeled the different jobs—summarizer, word wizard, discussion director, visualizer, connector and perspective seeker for the book *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. Students met in literature circle groups to share the work they had done for their “job”. They also rotated through jobs and met in literature circles for the book, *Frindle*.

East Lansing has mandated Language Arts units for each grade. There are five in 4th grade—Personal Narrative, Myths & Legends, Mystery, Poetry and Non-fiction. Each unit is laid out in a binder with lesson summaries, graphic organizers, and assessment ideas. The district also provides class sets of the books that go with each unit. My CT taught the Personal Narrative unit and is just finishing up the Myths & Legends unit. Both units followed a similar structure. The class reads several books that are examples of the genre, and records the genre characteristics of each book in a graphic organizer. Sometimes the teacher reads, and sometimes students read on their own or in pairs.

To complete the unit students try to write their own personal narrative/myth using what they have learned about the genre. This is the closest we have come to doing Writer’s Workshop. When the students write their unit-ending piece they do some pre-writing, draft, conference with a peer, conference with a teacher and then make a final draft. The students take their writing through the writing process, but it is not really set up like a true Writer’s Workshop.

Every month the students have an assigned book report to be completed at home. So far they have read biographies, mysteries, and how-to books. The reports are different every month and have been an advertisement for the book, showing how to do something, and a box of items that represent the subject of a biography. There is always an oral component where the students present their book activity to the rest of the class.

In science the students have done some non-fiction reading where they highlight and use text to fill in a graphic organizer. In Social Studies the students read from the textbook or have it read to them. In both Science and Social Studies the students are sometimes asked to write what they know about a topic. Students always have the choice to read or write whatever they wish if there is time after they finish their work.

For my lead teaching I will continue with the spelling and Daily Oral Language activities that are in place. I hope to have some time for a true Writer’s Workshop, but
this is something I need to discuss with my CT. I will have some reading and writing activities in Social Studies as well.

My main focus for language arts will be the Mystery Unit from the district. The unit binder has worksheets and graphic organizers for students to fill out. There are class sets of the books used in the unit and a video that goes with the unit as well. The lessons are laid out quite clearly. The latter half of the unit incorporates literature circles where students get to choose among several mystery books. They complete literature circle jobs and meet in a group to discuss with others reading the same book. This unit, similar to the others, ends with the students writing their own mystery.

**Knowledge of Content**

I feel comfortable with the content of the mystery unit. I have read and watched many mystery stories. I have looked over and familiarized myself with the vocabulary for the unit, including the genre characteristics. I have also read some of the books that are used in the unit. I need to read the rest of the books so I will be able to help students who choose to read those books. I also feel comfortable facilitating literature circles because I have had experience with them earlier in the year. This unit mainly hits the GLCE of identifying and describing a genre and the story elements. The unit also hits on making connections to other texts, personal experiences and events in the world. Discussing understanding of text with other students, and asking questions after reading will also be included. For the writing process, 4th graders are supposed to think about audience and purpose, draft stories using graphic organizers, use a variety of sentence structure and vocabulary and construct clear, grammatically correct paragraphs, give specific suggestions to improve others’ writing, and edit their own writing.

**Issues or Concerns**

I feel most comfortable with the part of the unit where the students choose a book and then meet in literature circles with others reading the same book. Literature circles were fairly successful in the fall and I felt like this helped with students’ comprehension. I feel least comfortable with the beginning of the unit where students are supposed to read several short mysteries and fill in graphic organizers to determine genre characteristics. I realize that it is important to identify the genre characteristics, but in the other two units, this task took several days and was so dry and boring. I wanted to fall asleep and I’m sure the students felt the same way. I also couldn’t tell how much they really got out of using the graphic organizers. I suggested to students that they use their graphic organizers when writing their own stories but I’m not sure that any of them did. I think I would like to make this more of a discussion. I also want to use fewer examples and just go more indepth with those examples—quality vs. quantity, I suppose. I’m not sure how closely I need to stick to the unit binder.

I am also considering looking in our book room to see if there are other mysteries, like * Mystery on Mackinac Island or The Egypt Game*, because I think some of the book choices in the unit are cheesy and not great literature. I also want to have different reading levels represented in the book choices.

II. Pre-Assessment for Mystery Unit
Assessment Tools

For pre-assessing three of my students, I am using three assessment tools, as well as my general observations and experiences with the students. The first tool is a brainstorming sheet with “Mysteries” in the middle and students’ ideas relating to that concept written around the center bubble. The second tool is the students’ grades on their Literature Circle jobs for the book, *Frindle*. These are from a couple months ago. The third tool is the students’ Michigan myths that they just finished writing last week. The Michigan myth writing assignment followed the Myths & Legends Language Arts Unit. This represents their ability to write a story using genre characteristics from a genre that was read and discussed over several weeks. The mystery unit asks students to do the same thing for the mystery genre.

Student One

Student one’s brainstorm about mysteries included: *They have clues to find what happened. Clues go very slowly one by one. Clues are like if you find footsteps. Clues also mean that if something was stolen then that’s a clue. You don’t know what they did and what they stole and who it is.* This tells me that the student has a basic understanding of the premise of a mystery and the literary device of suspense. She uses the vocabulary word “clue” and references stealing, which is a common mystery theme. I anticipate student one will be comfortable with some of the unit vocabulary and will have a schema for understanding the new vocabulary. This student got an 83% for the average of her literature circle jobs (connector, artful illustrator, summarizer, word wizard, discussion direction & perspective seeker). This is a little higher than average for the class. It tells
me that she can complete all of the jobs, but may need some more guidance with these skills. This student is sometimes shy or doesn’t want to share her work. This seems to prevent her from doing her best on the literature circle jobs because she has to share her work with the group. I anticipate a similar issue with the literature circle jobs in this unit.

Student One’s Michigan myth shows me that she can be successful with genre writing, story structure and using literary devices. The story has a clear beginning, middle, and end. There is a conflict and a resolution that explain how a Michigan landform came to be or have a certain name, which is a common theme in myths. This student was also able to supply similes and dialogue to enhance the story. The biggest issue here is confidence. She has the ability to be a successful writer, and she just needs to believe that this is true. I anticipate the challenge for this student will be having the confidence to start writing her mystery.

As far as reading during the unit, I think this student is capable of independent reading because she was tested at the beginning of the year as being on grade level (after being below grade level last year). Her past responses lead me to think she is able to comprehend most texts that we read.

**Student Two**

Student two’s brainstorm about mysteries included: *I’ve read the book Goosebumps. There’s a problem. There’s a solution about the problem. They creep me out. There is always a caution about the book. They are sometimes scary. They are sometimes funny.* I think this student is a little less sure about the mystery genre. It seems most of her ideas about linked to *Goosebumps* books, which have horror elements
and are one kind of mystery. It is interesting that she is most specific about how the genre makes her feel than elements of the writing itself.

I anticipate this student to have difficulty with the literature circle roles because she has a score of 58% on her last round of literature circle jobs. I remember some of the papers she turned in for these assignments and they were very vague and incomplete. I do not believe this student fully understands the tasks and she has difficulty carrying them out because she is not fully comprehending the text. If this student were left to work on the jobs independently again, I expect she would have difficulties.

Writing the mystery at the end of the unit may be somewhat of a challenge for student two. In her myth, there is a clear beginning, middle and end, and the story does explain how white tailed deer came to be. The use of animals with human traits and nature themes did match the themes of myths we read in class. However, this student struggled some to come up with similes (a required literary device for the assignment) in the story, and the story lacks real conflict. I think the hardest part of writing the mystery for her will be using the literary devices and writing styles unique to a mystery, like foreshadowing, creating suspense and including a red herring. I really expect all students to be challenged by this, though, because mystery is a difficult genre to write.

Student Three

Student three brainstormed: clues, problem, solution, result of solution, small problem. This student may have more prior knowledge about mysteries and just had
trouble recalling it, or he may have limited knowledge about the topic. This student normally picks up on things quickly, so I do not anticipate he will have trouble learning about a new genre, though if he has limited schema, he may need several examples of the new concepts.

This student got a 75% on his last round of literature circle jobs. I remember his job sheets having a good start, but not digging any deeper. He may have trouble getting past the surface features of the mystery text and picking up on subtleties. This would present a challenge during independent work to identify genre characteristics.

Student three’s myth follows very closely with the genre characteristics of a myth. He successfully uses several similes. There is a clear beginning, middle and end. There is conflict and a hero sacrifices for the greater good, resulting in a tribute to the hero that is a part of Michigan history. This leads me to think that the student will be able to successfully mimic the style and literary devices of the mysteries we read. This particular student likes frequent validation of his ideas, and if he gets this, he can confidently write.

**Reflection**

At first I did not plan on talking much about the literature circle jobs because the students have done these for two books earlier in the year. However, looking at these three students’ scores and remembering back to the difficulties many students experienced with these tasks, I feel it is necessary to go over them again. I would like to model the jobs for the books and short stories we read as a class. I will have students make connections, ask questions, think about how a character is feeling, draw a picture of
what they read, identify words that should be looked up, and summarize passages during whole group reading and discussion. This will serve as a good review for some and hopefully clarify the strategies and provide practice for others.

I also just assumed that students would be able to pick out the genre characteristics in mystery texts we read, like they did with myths. Now that I think more about mysteries, though, there are a lot of subtleties and it takes a good reader to pick up on some of the clues, which are the key to comprehending the story. I may need to make these subtleties explicit with the first few stories, and think aloud about how I am making connections and identifying clues. It may help some students to write down clues they find out as they are reading. Many students will also need a lot of scaffolding for writing their own mysteries, like graphic organizers to plan out the story, especially the clues.

III. Daily Lesson Plans

Lesson 1: What is a Mystery?

Date: Monday, February 13, 2006 (40 minutes)

Purpose: This lesson will activate students’ prior knowledge about the mystery genre and define the genre characteristics that authors use in writing mysteries.

Rationale: This lesson provides students with a common language and schema for talking and thinking about mysteries.

GLCEs:
- Identify and describe a variety of genre of narrative texts

Goals/Objectives for today’s lesson:
Students will:
- Brainstorm prior knowledge about mysteries
- Identify examples from their brainstorming of the genre characteristics of mysteries
- Try to solve a mystery riddle

Materials & supplies needed:
- Overhead of the mystery riddle
- Overhead projector and transparencies
- Mystery books
• Mystery elements poster
• Copy of mystery riddle for each student

**Procedures and approximate time allocated for each event**

*Introduction to the lesson*

Today we’re starting our next language arts unit and this one is on mysteries. Show the students an assortment of mystery books (including science mysteries and mystery riddles) that will be available for them to look at and read throughout the mystery unit.

*OUTLINE of key events during the lesson*

- Pass back students’ pre-assessment papers. I’m passing back the sheet where you told me what you already know about mysteries. You can refer to these for some ideas, and with everyone contributing ideas we should be able to come up with everything we know about mysteries as a class.

- Students share ideas: What is a mystery? What do you think about when you think of the word detective? How does an author keep you on the edge of your seat? Can riddles be mysteries? Is there humor in mystery stories?

- Now you’re going to turn to the person next to you, or if you’re at a group of three, work with the other two people at your table to brainstorm all the signs, symbols, pictures and words that are associated with the words “mystery” and “detective”. Let’s see how many things you can come up with, and after a few minutes, we’ll have you share your ideas with the class. (5 minutes)

- Collect students’ ideas on the overhead. Read over list of ideas. What kinds of mysteries have you heard about? (e.g. crime stories, mystery stories, movies, detective stories, riddles) Was there a problem that was solved? Were there suspects? Did you guess the solution when you read or watched the mystery? Do all mystery stories have detectives, clues, plot and resolution? (4 minutes)

- Ask students for the names of their favorite mystery books (have them think back to their mystery book

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**Academic, Social and Linguistic Support during each event** (see p. 71):

If a student seems hesitant to participate, I will call on that student and ask him/her to share which mystery book he/she read for mystery book reports and describe something about that book that makes it a mystery.

I will walk around to make sure students are talking about the assigned topic and prompt them with questions if they are having trouble coming up with ideas.
report). Share own favorite mystery stories. (3 minutes)

- Explain that there are certain elements found in a mystery and show students the mystery elements poster, posting it on the wall. Read over the six elements, briefly explaining each. (5 minutes)

- *Can you find any examples from our list for any of these elements?* Have students write their example on a sticky note and put it in the appropriate place on the poster. (Use just one color sticky note) (5 minutes)

- *Now we’re going to take a look at our first mystery, and this one is a mystery riddle.* Put up mystery riddle transparency. Please read this to yourself and try to figure out what happened. [Pass out copy of mystery riddle to each student]. *It might help you to draw out what you read in the story to figure out the riddle.* (4 minutes)

- Collect student ideas, discuss them, and finally reveal the solution if a student has not gotten it already. (3 minutes)

**Closing summary for the lesson**

*Can someone summarize what we talked about today? What did you learn today about mysteries that you didn’t know before?* (2 minutes)

**Transition to next learning activity** (1 minute)

*Keep the scrap paper in your mystery folder. Once you’re cleaned up you may head out for recess.*

### Assessment

I will be listening for students’ ideas about mysteries to see what they already know about the genre elements and characteristics. I will observe how well they are able to identify examples of the elements of a mystery.

### Academic, Social, and Linguistic Support during assessment

If some students seem frustrated with the riddle I will remind the class that this is a tough riddle and that I myself had trouble figuring it out.

If there are any students who seemed to be less engaged, I will ask for their comments, to see what was picked up during the lesson.

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**Lesson 2: Explaining Mystery Vocabulary**
**Date:** Tuesday, February 14, 2006 (40 minutes)

**Purpose:** The purpose of this lesson is to continue to identify and explain the characteristics of what makes up a mystery. Vocabulary will be introduced along with revisiting the elements that make up the mystery genre.

**Rationale:** Similarly to yesterday’s lesson, this lesson provides students with common language for thinking and talking about the mystery genre.

**GLCEs:**
- Identify and describe a variety of genre of narrative texts
- Identify how authors use flashback or flash forward events to enhance the plot/story or create suspense.
- Retell, using his/her own words, information and details from fiction
- Classify and categorize ideas and events within a text

**Goals/Objectives for today’s lesson:**
**Student’s will**
- Identify examples of the literary devices: alibi, clue, deduction, evidence, foreshadowing, red herring, sleuth, suspects, witness and crime in a mystery story that is read to them.

**Materials & supplies needed:**
- *Baffling Whodunit Puzzles* by Jim Sukah
- Overhead of mystery vocabulary definitions
- Vocabulary Elements found in Mystery worksheet for each student

**Procedures and approximate time allocated for each event**

- **Introduction to the lesson** (5 minutes)
  Direct student attention to the mystery elements poster from the previous day. Call on students to briefly describe each element. Teacher reads the post-it note examples (since they are too small for everyone to read from their seats).

*Today we’re going to learn about the literary devices authors use when writing a mystery. Can anyone tell us what a literary device is, or give an example of one? (If no one has an example, tell students that they used one in their myth writing--similes). By using certain literary devices, the author makes it fun from the readers’ point of view to try and figure out “who did it,” and try to guess the solution to the mystery.*

- **OUTLINE of key events during the lesson**
  - Explain each literary device. Model how to make a
text to self, text to text and text to world connection about examples of mystery literary devices. Encourage students to share their own connections.

- Read a short mystery from the book, *Baffling Whodunit Puzzles*. Instruct students to be listening for examples of the mystery vocabulary that was just talked about.
- Students work with the people at their table to identify the elements they found in the story on their worksheet. (5 minutes or longer if discussion is still productive)
- Gather class back together and have students share the ideas that came up in their group. Students will write down anything shared by other groups that their group did not come up with. I will be modeling this on the overhead by recording the ideas on a transparency of the student worksheet.

**Possible Extension:** If students struggle with identifying examples of the vocabulary, next period begin with another short mystery using this same worksheet.

- **Closing summary for the lesson**
  What did you learn today about mysteries and mystery vocabulary that you didn’t know before?

- **Transition to next learning activity**
  Please keep these worksheets in your mystery folder in your desk. Once you’re clean up you may go out for recess.

**Assessment:** I will be assessing students’ abilities to make connections with mystery stories. From the conversation during group work and the ideas shared during whole class discussion, I will get a feel for how students are able to identify examples of mystery vocabulary.

**Academic, Social, and Linguistic Support during assessment**
I will offer students assistance if they are having trouble making connections while working in their groups by further modeling and prompting.

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**Lesson 3: Identifying Mystery Characteristics in a Video**

**Date:** Wednesday, February 15, 2006; Thursday, February 16; Tuesday, February 21 (3-40 minute sessions)
Purpose: The purpose of this lesson is to reinforce understanding of the elements and vocabulary of mysteries through the video, The Great Mouse Detective.

Rationale: Students will have an opportunity to apply what they have been learning about mystery genre characteristics to a video mystery text.

GLCEs:
- Identify and describe a variety of genre of narrative texts
- Identify how authors use flashback or flash forward events to enhance the plot/story or create suspense.
- Retell, using his/her own words, information and details from fiction
- Classify and categorize ideas and events within a text

Goals/Objectives for today’s lesson:
Students will:
- Identify mystery elements in a video as the story unfolds.

Materials & supplies needed:
- Analyzing the Mystery Story graphic organizer for each student
- The Great Mouse Detective video
- Chart paper

Procedures and approximate time allocated for each event

• Introduction to the lesson  Please pull out your mystery folders and get out the mystery vocabulary sheet that we worked on yesterday. Let’s go through each one to make sure we remember what they all mean. Call on students to review the definition and/or give an example for each vocabulary word.

• OUTLINE of key events during the lesson
  - Pass out graphic organizers.
  - Explain to students that they will be watching a mystery that is a video and that while they watch the video, they should be recording any examples of the vocabulary on their graphic organizer that they see in the movie.
  - Play about 30 minutes of the movie.
  - Day 2
    - Show the rest of the movie and have students continue to fill in their graphic organizer.
  - Day 3
    - Finish last 10 minutes of the movie.

Academic, Social and Linguistic Support during each event (see p. 71):
Students work in groups to share the characteristics they identified in the movie. (10 minutes)

- Groups share what they identified in the movie and teacher records on chart paper. (15 minutes)
- I will make sure the subtle or hidden clues are identified if none of the groups come up with these on their own.
- Students will draw a picture of one of the examples of the mystery vocabulary.

**Closing summary for the lesson**

Would anyone like to share their drawing, or what they chose to draw? So would you say The Great Mouse Detective is a good example of a mystery? Why? You did a good job today, we’ll be looking at more mysteries

**Transition to next learning activity**

Number twos please collect everyone’s movie worksheet and bring them up to me. Mystery folders away, and you may head out for recess.

**Assessment:** I will look at each student’s worksheet to see how many vocabulary words they were able to identify from the video. I will also be looking at the quality of the answer. “There was a clue in the video,” is low quality. “The footsteps leading out the door” is high quality.

**Grading:**
3: Student identifies 5 characteristics
2: Student identifies 3 characteristics
1: Student identifies less than 3 characteristics

**Lesson 4: Reading Short Mysteries and Identifying Literary Devices**

**Date:** Wednesday, February 22, 2006 (40 minutes)

**Purpose:** The purpose of this lesson is to investigate the question: What literary devices do authors use in writing mysteries?

**Rationale:** This lesson gives students more practice with identifying examples of mystery elements in a text.

**GLCEs:**
- Identify how authors use flashback or flash forward events to enhance the plot/story or create suspense.
- Retell, using his/her own words, information and details from fiction
- Classify and categorize ideas and events within a text

**Goals/Objectives for today’s lesson:**

Students will:
- Complete a graphic organizer in which they identify examples of mystery elements and vocabulary in a story they read.

**Materials & supplies needed:**
- Copies of *The Disappearing Dimes* and *The Case of the Ruines Roses* for each student
- Analyzing the Mystery Story graphic organizer for each student
- Chart paper

**Procedures and approximate time allocated for each event**

**• Introduction to the lesson**

*Today we are going to read two mysteries together and identify the mystery elements and vocabulary that we find in the stories.*

**• OUTLINE of key events during the lesson**

- Pass out a copy of *The Disappearing Dimes* to each student. The teacher reads and students follow along and underline parts of the story that are either an element or fit a definition of a vocabulary word.
- Pass out sticky notes and have students write down examples from the story of the elements and vocabulary. (While students do this, teacher writes elements and vocabulary on chart paper in a list). Invite students to place their sticky notes in the correct spot on the chart paper.
- Facilitate a discussion about what was found in the story, bring up anything that students did not bring up themselves
- *Now we’re going to read another mystery story.* [Pass out second story]. *You may choose to work independently or with a partner to read The Case of the Ruined Roses and fill in the graphic organizer for that story, just like we did with The Disappearing Dimes.*
- Give students about 15-20 minutes to complete this task, visit students to get a feel for how they are able to pick out the elements, offer help if needed, give hints.
• **Closing summary for the lesson**
  - Call class back together and discuss what students found when working on their own.

• **Transition to next learning activity**
  - Number threes please collect everyone’s sheet at your table and bring them to me. Mystery folders go in your desk and then you may go to recess.

**Assessment:** I will collect the graphic organizers students fill out to see how well they are able to identify the elements of a mystery story. I will look especially for the elements that are more difficult to identify in the stories.

**Grading:**
3: Student identifies 5 characteristics
2: Student identifies 3 characteristics
1: Student identifies less than 3 characteristics

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**Lesson 5: Using Guided Reading for Mystery Elements**

**Date:** Thursday, February 23, 2006 2-(40 minute sessions)

**Purpose:** The purpose of this lesson is to give the students the opportunity to read and explore mysteries in small group guided reading. They should come prepared to discuss the genre elements and the vocabulary that was taught in previous lessons.

**Rationale:** This lesson gives the teacher the opportunity to check in with each student about a text that is at his/her reading level. It also provides opportunity for assessment of identifying mystery elements and vocabulary examples and comparing/contrasting two mystery texts.

**GLCEs:**
- Identify how authors use flashback or flash forward events to enhance the plot/story or create suspense.
- Retell, using his/her own words, information and details from fiction
- Classify and categorize ideas and events within a text
- Show through writing that s/he knows how two stories are connected
- Sort details and events to make charts, lists, and other graphic organizers

**Goals/Objectives for today’s lesson:**
Students will:
- Use what they know about mystery elements and vocabulary to identify examples of these in two short mystery stories.
- Use a graphic organizer to compare the literary elements of two mystery stories
## Materials & supplies needed:
- copies of *The Case of the Missing Ring*, *The Case of the Missing Babe Ruth Baseball* and *The Binnacle Boy*.

### Procedures and approximate time allocated for each event

#### Introduction to the lesson

Today you’re going to be in three different groups, with each group reading a different mystery. You’ll find out which story you’re reading in just a minute. While you’re reading your story, you should use post-it notes to identify where you find mystery elements or examples of the mystery vocabulary.

Model how this would be done using a previously read mystery story. Tell class that the groups will be meeting with the teacher one at a time at the long table in the back of the room to share what elements and vocabulary examples they are finding in their story.

#### OUTLINE of key events during the lesson

- **If I call your name, please come get a copy of your mystery story.** Pass out stories using pre-selected groups and give students color-coordinated post-its, each group gets a different color.
- Students begin reading and teacher sits at the back table with chart paper. The paper has mystery elements and vocabulary listed on it already.
- Teacher calls up groups one at a time for a guided reading session. Students put post-its in correct spot on chart paper. Group discusses what students have identified. Teacher asks questions to find out how well students are understanding the process of identifying these characteristics.
- When students finish with their mystery, they will go to the round table and get a copy of another mystery story and a comparison chart. They will work independently to read the story and fill out the comparison chart for the second story and the one they read for guided reading. The comparison chart will have directions for the order in which to complete it. (e.g. fill in what you identified in the story that you already read and met with the teacher about, then read the second story and fill in the chart for that one. Lastly write the similarities and differences you find for each category (each row)).

**Academic, Social and Linguistic Support during each event (see p. 71):**
• **Closing summary for the lesson** (How will I bring closure to the lesson and help children reflect on their experiences? How will I help them make connections to prior lessons or prepare for future experiences? What kind of feedback do I want from them at this time?) (___ minutes)

• **Transition to next learning activity**

  **Assessment**  I will collect the comparison charts students fill out to evaluate their competency in identifying genre characteristics and comparing these from one story to another.

  **Grading:**
  3: Students identify and compare elements of 2 stories by using 5 characteristics of mystery genre
  2: Students identify and compare elements of 2 stories by using 3 characteristics of mystery genre
  1: Students cannot compare elements found in 2 stories

  **Academic, Social, and Linguistic Support during assessment**
  I will visit the student who has trouble understanding directions to have her explain the directions to me before she starts on the independent assignment.

**IV. Analytic Reflection and Revised Lesson Plans**

**General Reflections and Comments**

For this lesson the students were in their seats, in table groups of three or four. I stood in the front of the room and used the overhead projector at the front of the room for part of the lesson. This lesson’s purpose was to introduce students to the mystery novel, *The Chameleon Wore Chartreuse*, review mystery elements, and establish expectations for the reading of the novel and the assignment which follows it.

I wanted to focus on giving clear explanations, making expectations explicit and modeling for understanding. I feel sometimes I move too quickly through directions or incorrectly assume that students have enough prior knowledge to complete a task without some form of modeling by the teacher. In the video, I was looking to see whether students understood what I was saying and if they were engaged. I also listened to my explanations to see how clear they were.
The majority of students were engaged during the explanations and discussion. All of the students’ attention seemed to be captured while I was reading the back of the book to them. One student has his head on his desk while I’m explaining. I could have further engaged the students by having pictures of a real gecko and chameleon and a few facts about them.

Listening to myself speak, I noticed that I talk a little fast sometimes and also need to enunciate more. As far as content, the lesson seemed well-organized and clear. I clarified that I was going to model how to use a reading journal with a mystery story that we had already read, but that they would be using a reading journal for *The Chameleon Wore Chartreuse*. In case some students had not been paying attention, or for my student who has difficulty focusing, this would help clear up the misconception that they should imitate exactly what I was doing.

I really stressed why keeping a reading log would be useful to the students. It made the reading log sound less like an assignment and more like a tool that good readers use. I think modeling a reading log entry was helpful because when it came time for students to do this on their own they had little trouble and used the format I had modeled.

I should have checked individually with one student who has extreme difficulty focusing, listening to, and understanding directions. She started to fill out her “Mapping a Mystery” sheet during the first reading session, though the directions were to refer to this page but not fill it out until the entire book was read. If I were to teach this lesson again, I would have had her tell me what that sheet was for and what she will do with it. On the plus side, she was the only one to do this, so all the other students did understand the expectation. The explanation of reading options (individual, partner, read aloud) was
thorough. This set clear expectations for how the next three or four reading sessions would run.

Overall, I feel it was worth taking the time to give explicit directions, set expectations, and model the assignment for the students. I feel that even someone who had not been in our class previously would have been able to understand what would be happening during the next few reading sessions. They could have understood what the assignments would be and how to complete them. To me, this is a good test of how clear an explanation is.

As we were going through the mystery elements, it would have been helpful to have a visual, like a poster with all the elements on it, to refer to as we went along. I could have moved around the room to be nearer those students who have trouble focusing. That way all the students would have had a chance to see the book as we talked about it.

The lesson got sidetracked while I tried to figure out where each student was keeping his or her mystery unit materials. I brought up the fact that each student needed a safe, reliable place to keep these materials when the unit began, but I should have also checked on this during the second and third mystery unit sessions to establish this norm. Doing this would have prevented the sidetracking in this lesson.
V. Reflection on Unit

Overall, I feel the mystery unit went well. I basically followed the district curriculum and activities, but tried to modify them to increase student enjoyment and understanding. Right before teaching the first lesson in the unit, I made a last-minute decision to begin by reading the book, *Piggins*, a picture mystery book I had. From the pre-assessments, I saw that students were coming into this unit with varying amounts of background knowledge about the genre. I wanted to have everyone more on the same page before we started brainstorming, and I thought a good way to do this was by sharing a mystery story. This gave everyone at least one experience with elements of a mystery and it helped to activate background knowledge when we did get to the brainstorming. If we got stuck, I could reference a part of *Piggins* to get things rolling again.

I was impressed by the prior knowledge about mysteries that the students shared during our brainstorming and discussion. They came up with much more than they had written on their pre-assessments. I think a lot of students would rather talk about something than write it down. Most students had a pretty good initial handle on the vocabulary and elements of a mystery. The class came up with 5 of the 6 elements listed in the curriculum, only missing “realistic setting.” One student confused the terms “red herring” and “red-handed”, another confused “alibi” and “ally”. Despite these confusions they continued to participate and were not discouraged. This makes me think that students feel safe taking risks in our classroom.

Some of the short mysteries provided in the district curriculum were not excellent examples of the elements being taught. In “The Case of the Disappearing Dimes,” I myself had trouble identifying some of the elements. For being at the beginning of the
unit, I think it would be better to use a story with obvious examples. The students did enjoy the mysteries where they got to try and solve the mystery themselves.

The unit has four assessments built-in. Each is a graphic organizer basically asking students to fill in examples of mystery vocabulary and elements from the story. In addition to this, one assessment has students compare the elements they identified. For each of the four assessments, the grading rubric is the same—3 points for correctly identifying 5 elements, 2 points for 3 elements and 1 point for less than 3 elements. However, in some of the stories/graphic organizers there were less possible elements to identify, so getting 5 correct was harder. This may make sense if the harder assessments were placed near the end of the unit, but that is not how it was laid out. If I were to teach this unit again, I would adjust the assessments to have progressively harder grading.

I feel I could have added more discussion and modeling to prepare students for the assessments, especially the comparison assessment. I just assumed the comparison part would be easy, but some gave answers, such as, “They both have clues,” when they were supposed to be comparing the clues in both stories. Next time around I would model how to compare for one of the categories. I would also slow the pace down a little. At times I felt I was trying to “get through” one lesson to move on to the next. The part that got skipped over was the post-story discussion, a chance to clear up confusion and re-enforce the mystery elements.

My worry about collaboration for assessments was that I would not find out who needed more practice because students who may have answered incorrectly or not put something down could have copied their partner’s ideas. If the students were discussing and both people writing the same answer understood the reason behind it, that would be
fine, but it is hard to know if that is what is happening in every case. I did adjust the video lesson plan to include peer conferring time at the end of each video watching session. I believe this was helpful for students who missed some things while watching the movie. I myself did not catch everything—forty eyes are better than two.

Reflecting back on the unit, I regret that there was very little higher level thinking. The unit had a fairly narrow focus on the twelve or so mystery vocabulary terms. The assessments were designed to measure how many of these terms students could correctly identify examples of in a mystery text. I would like to have challenged the students to think about why the mysteries’ authors made the literary decisions they did. Why does an author use foreshadowing? Why does an author use a red herring? What does it add to the story? Is it possible for an author to use too many clues, red herrings, or something else, so that it detracts from the story? Having these kinds of discussions would also have better prepared the students to write their own mystery.

In teaching this unit in the future, I would also broaden the definition of mystery. In the initial brainstorming students supplied ideas such as “unsolved mysteries” and “science mysteries”. This unit really focuses on detective stories, but it would be good to talk about other kinds of mystery texts. I would include more about the idea of a deduction. We make deductions in math, science, and other parts of our lives. Students could relate this knowledge about deduction when it occurs in a mystery story.

I like that I gave students a choice about reading—read aloud with the teacher, partner or individual. Some students made a different choice on different days. Most chose the read aloud group. I did most of the reading with students following along, but the students also took turns reading. They rarely have the opportunity to practice reading
aloud at this grade and it was good practice for them. In the read aloud group it really felt like a reading community. Students were helping each other to find page numbers, remember what had happened, decide whether or not something was a clue, a red herring, etc. Part of me was excited this talk was going on and part of me felt bad that those who were reading independently were not getting this dialogue. It gave me a good feeling about what guided reading groups can be like. Basically we were one large (14 people at one point) reading group.

I was reminded of TE 150 when we talked about different stages of cognitive development while reading *The Chameleon Wore Chartreuse*. The humor in the book is on a more sophisticated level than most books fourth grade readers. It was interesting to see which students were at the level where they “got” the humor, and which students had no idea something was intended to be funny. I wonder if this is a developmental issue or if it has more to do with exposure and maturity.