

Grade 10: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* – Agatha Christie (on the list)

Summary

Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is a highly engaging who-done-it mystery with many layers and plot twists. The novel has been considered controversial from the time it was published in 1926. In this mystery the reader must work to decipher truths from lies, and learn who can be trusted, if anyone.

Activity One: Clue

Learning Outcome: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent to manage ideas and information.

Rationale: This activity is designed to specifically address the third GLO and all of its SLO's for the Manitoba Senior Two curriculum. The Clue game will play out throughout the reading of the novel, requiring students to take on the role of detective and work together to identify, access, collect, record, organize, question, analyze, and evaluate information throughout the novel to draw informed conclusions about the characters and plot of the novel. This activity is an interactive visual way of representing the plot of the novel while requiring the students to engage with the characters.

Grade: This is a great activity for any grade as long as it fits the novel. It also works well for *In the Heat of the Night*. It works very well with grades 8 – 10 while students are still developing a deeper understanding of plot and character.

Timeline: This activity extends throughout the reading of the novel. Start students with a discussion of what they need to do to be good detectives, and then play the game throughout the novel. To summarize have students look back over their notes to see if there is anything they had missed that

would have led to them identifying the murderer. If they do get it right debrief on how they read the clues correctly.

Materials:

Detective books

Clue board game or own version (relabel the rooms)

A table or desk

Paper for character profiles

Blank cards for adding characters to the board

Digital camera

Scrapbook

Chapter labels

Steps:

- 1.) Explain Clue to students. Discuss what the role of the detective is. Hand out detective books along with the novel. Students are to keep notes on characters and other important information that will help them identify the killer as they read through the novel.
- 2.) Set up empty Clue board on a table where it can be left for the remainder of the novel. Have students list off the characters that have been introduced to in the novel. For each character have students work in groups to create a character profile poster to place up on the wall. The posters should contain a description, the character's relation to other characters, the character's reason for being present, and other information students feel is important. Place these around the room and have students add to the existing profiles and add new profiles as characters enter the story.

- 3.) Have students place the victim(s) in the appropriate room on the board. As you read through the novel students should place a chapter label next to the board and arrange characters based on where they are in the novel during that chapter.
- 4.) After each chapter students should work in pairs or small groups to go over their notes and the profiles they have placed on the walls to create a prediction of who the murder is, stating what makes them feel it is the identified character. The predictions can be placed in an envelope for each chapter that can be reviewed after the book is finished.
- 5.) After completing the book have students discuss their reactions. Are they surprised? Were there any clues leading up to the reveal? How does the ending change their trust in specific characters? Why did or didn't they suspect the murder? Looking back can they identify the evidence that would have identified the killer?
- 6.) Hand out the chapter predictions to different groups and let them sort through what the class guessed. Students can see what others were thinking and see if anyone predicted correctly, and if they did, at what point in the novel.
- 7.) For assessment students can turn in their Detective books for you to review their information collection.

Additional Considerations: I feel this activity will be most effective if a set amount of time from each class is set aside for Clue while reading the novel. Students can start classes off by making notes and adding to profiles until everyone is ready to start. Students can also work in pairs and each be in charge

of arranging the Clue board for a chapter. To help visual students you can take a photo of the board for each chapter and place them into a scrapbook for students to review.

Personal Connections: I first read this novel in my second year at the University of Manitoba. It was then that I thought that the book would make an excellent clue game. I have not had a chance to try this, but would love to implement it when I have the opportunity. I like the book because I feel mysteries are particularly gender neutral and engaging for all students. Also it is the type of text that encourages close reading and critical thinking.

Activity Two: Extra! Extra! Read All About it!

Learning Outcome: Students will read, write, and represent to generate and focus essential information using a news article format and the five W's and H.

Rationale: This activity is designed specifically to help students identify essential information in a text. By having students play the role of News Reporter and summarize the essential information around Roger Ackroyd's murder this activity encourages students to filter information and organize the main ideas into a concise report. This activity also encourages students to become familiar with a newspaper article format and with the word processing program, and invites students to be creative, giving life to their article by naming their newspaper and adding in images.

Grade: I would use this particular activity with grades 8-12 and alter it as needed. Having students produce newspaper articles is a great way for students to become familiar with other forms of writing, as well as create a sense of writing for a specific audience. Writing articles is also an effective way to help students learn to write concise factual information. The limited word count that reporters face everyday creates an interesting challenge for students.

Timeline: Ideally this activity will take place in two classes as students reach chapter five. This should come relatively early in the unit, possibly as early as day two or three. Students should have part of the first day to work on a rough draft to be completed for homework. The following class should be a computer lab for students to type up good copies of their articles. When students hand in their articles hang them up around the classroom so students can read the different versions of the same report.

Materials:

Novels

A computer Lab period

Detective notebooks

Newspapers

Steps:

- 1.) Start by reading Chapter five out to students in class.
- 2.) Explain assignment to class and review the five W's and H. (Who, What, Where, When, Why, How) Give students newspaper articles to work on in pairs. Once students can identify the five W's and the H in their article and show them to the teacher they can begin their assignment.
- 3.) Students trade Detective notebooks with someone in the classroom they are comfortable sharing with, they cannot use their own.
- 4.) Students work from chapter five in their novels, and the notes in the Detective Notebook they have to create a rough draft of a front page news article reporting the murder of Roger Ackroyd.

5.) In the computer lab have students type up good copies of their newspaper article. The article must include the five W's and H, as well as a newspaper name, a picture, and a quote from a person at the scene of the crime. The final article should be between 150 and 300 words.

Additional Considerations: To ensure that students create strong final copies of their articles make sure they are familiar with the word processing program on the school computers. It may be beneficial to give a brief mini lesson showing students how to insert graphics, word art, and charts or columns on their pages. Also, show students how to alter images in editing software like Photo Shop for creating their photo for the front page of their newspaper. You will have students create better articles if they feel confident using the technology. Also encourage students to peer edit articles for errors.

Personal connections: This activity is based off of something similar my Collaborating Teacher used during a poetry unit. She had students expand on a poem to fill in the details for a newspaper article. Students enjoyed it because they got to be creative with naming their newspaper and adding pictures and quotes. My Collaborating Teacher was in charge of the school newspaper and said that she found students responded well to creating newspaper articles because fact based writing was easier for most students in comparison to short stories. I think it would be a particularly useful activity for The Murder of Roger Ackroyd because the story has so many details for students to remember. My intention is that this activity will help them to learn how to sort through the information to identify the essential details.

Activity Three: Scratch

Learning Outcome: Students will represent characters through role play to deepen character understanding and encourage classroom community.

Rationale: This activity is designed actively engage students in exploring character in a fun and kinesthetic way. By having students physically take on the roles of characters through their voices, body language, and vocabulary students will develop a deeper understanding of the characters. At the same time the required interaction between students encourages a strong classroom community where students can enjoy learning together.

Grade: This activity can be adapted to fit other novels, but I find it is particularly suited to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. If it fit the novel study I would use it with grades 10-12, and possibly grade nine, depending on the class's maturity level. The game allows students a fair amount of freedom in their actions which requires students to be responsible and reasonable in their decisions.

Timeline: This activity works great as an activating strategy to get students thinking about the novel and the characters. It is also a great way to wake students up in the morning, or burn off some of their energy after lunch. Once students know the rules it can be played relatively quickly at the beginning or end of class. It is up to the teacher how long it takes, depending on how many rounds students are allowed to play. On average a round will not last longer than five minutes.

Materials:

A large open space/classroom with desks pushed to the side

Costumes and props

Steps:

1. Explain the game and the rules to the class. **(1)** One person plays Poirot, and one person plays the killer, everyone else plays a character of their choosing from the novel. **(2)** Poirot waits in the hall while a killer is chosen silently, only the teacher and the killer will know who it is. **(3)** When Poirot is let back into the room the characters begin to move around in role. **(4)** When characters stop to talk to each other they shake hands. **(5)** The killer, to choose a victim will use

a finger to scratch the palm of the victim's hand when they shake (demonstrate for the class).

(6) When a victim feels a scratch they must count to five or shake hands with another character before staging their death in whatever dramatic way they like. **(7)** It is Poirot's job to identify the killer before everyone dies. Poirot has three guesses before the killer gets away with murder.

(8) Bonus points to Poirot and the killer if Poirot can identify which character is the killer.

2. Students each select a character to play. One person volunteers to be Poirot. Poirot waits in the hall while the teacher has all the students close their eyes. He / She selects one student by taping them on the shoulder to be the killer. The teacher moves over to the door, tells the characters to open their eyes and lets Poirot back into the room and the game begins.
3. After each round a different student becomes Poirot and the killer can select the next killer and sit out a round (this way the teacher can play) or the teacher can continue to choose a new killer in the same way so that all students can play.

Additional Considerations: To really help students get into character encourage them to use body language and their voices to imitate what they imagine the characters to be like. If you have it available, provide students with bags of old clothes and hats and other props to really get into character. Also encourage students to make their deaths dramatic. They shouldn't just fall to the floor, they should die in a way that others might guess what has happened to them. Try and make it as fun as possible to really encourage students to get into role. Once the students start having fun with each other as a class a real sense of community can form that will make the learning environment even more positive and productive.

Personal Connections: This activity is adapted from a game I played in my drama class in high school. The game was essentially the same, but I have adapted this to include students taking on the roles of characters from the novel to add an extra layer to the activity. This way it is not just about building classroom community, it also brings in an element of character analysis and information recall.