Crime Scene Investigation: A Burglary at the Public Library

Overview
A crime has been committed at the public library and your students are on the case! In this activity students (as junior detectives) work with their local library and police department to solve the mystery of a stolen book. Throughout the activity, designed to be led as part of a fieldtrip to the public library, students learn about the roles and responsibilities of various library staff, as well as police.

Grades
3-5

Materials
- Images of signed Harry Potter book, attached
- Detective Notebook, handouts attached
  - This 3 page handout can be copied front/back, with the last blank page being used for overflow notes space.
- Suspect handouts for the following roles (attached):
  - Director of the Library
  - Children’s Librarian
  - Reference Librarian
  - Acquisitions Librarian
- Diagram of the crime scene (to be used for set up), attached
- Required crime scene materials:
  - A table or desk to stage the crime scene
  - 2 different color pieces of yarn or string and matching t-shirts. (The yarn/string will be used as “fibers” found at the crime scene.)
  - 4 library staff members to play “suspects”
  - Finger prints from suspects. This can be done one of two ways:
    - Print and cut out the attached fingerprints. Distribute the fingerprints as following:
      - Loopy: Library Director & crime scene
      - Swirly: Children’s Librarian
      - Whirly: Reference Librarian & crime scene
      - Curvy: Acquisitions Librarian & crime scene.
    - Use the actual finger prints of the library staff members who are playing the suspects. This can be done by using a pencil and piece of clear tape. See here for details: https://www.handonheartjewellery.co.uk/taking-fingerprints-using-pencil (If using real fingerprints, still follow the distribution list above.)
  - A paper/plastic coffee cup with the Acquisitions Librarian’s fingerprint taped to it
  - “Blood” samples, attached
  - Red marker to mimic a cut on the children’s librarian and the research librarian’s hands.
  - “Broken glass” from the picture frame. (This can be made out of plexiglass, acrylic or paper.)
  - Masking tape or chalk to outline on the table where the book was before it was stolen
  - Crime scene or caution tape. (Can be purchased online.)
- A detective from the local police or sheriff’s department
Inviting a professional from the police/sheriff’s department to participate in the crime scene investigation and talk about their work and role in the community is highly recommended. This allows students to learn about these departments in a highly engaging way.

Duration
45-75 minutes; varies depending on whether a law enforcement officer participates, as well as the amount of time provided by the teacher to conduct the investigation and allow for discussion

Teacher Preparation
This activity can be done in class or, preferably, during a trip to your local library. If teachers plan on completing this activity at the local library, contact the library staff several weeks before visiting and share this activity with them. Ask the library to reserve a room for the activity, and request four staff members to participate in the simulation and provide them with their roles. To make it more authentic, have the library staff assume the suspect role that corresponds with their actual position at the library. Ideally the library staff will prepare the room before the class arrives, or teachers can set up while students do another activity, such as a library tour. To complete the simulation, teachers will need the following:

- A table for the crime scene at one end of the reserved room. Leave enough room so that the class can gather around the table to examine the evidence. If your class is large, teachers may wish to add a second table with an identical crime scene, so that the class can be split into two groups. Use the attached Diagram of the Crime Scene for a visual on how to set the table up.
- Four chairs for the suspects to sit in while they’re being interviewed. Since the interviews will be short and students will be rotating to talk to each suspect, they will not need chairs.
- Teachers can use their discretion when setting up the crime scene. In order for the scenario provided to make sense, teachers should include all the required materials. Teachers can also add additional elements to the crime scene, such as lamps, papers, etc. to make it more authentic and creative.
- If teachers plan on inviting a representative from the police/sheriff’s department to help lead the investigation and talk to the class about their job, role in the community, etc. (highly recommended), teachers should contact the department well in advance.

Student Preparation
Ask students to brainstorm questions for the law enforcement representative and library officials a few days before completing this activity. Use the list of questions below as a guide.

Procedure

Warm Up: A Crime’s Been Committed

1. As a warmup, project or print and distribute the attached photos of a framed Harry Potter book autographed by the author, JK Rowling. Ask students:
   - What do you see here?
   - Do you think a signed Harry Potter book would be very valuable? How much would you estimate it would sell for? (Let students know that this signed copy was valued at $2,600!)
   - If you owned this and someone stole it, what would you do?

2. Inform students that JK Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series, recently visited their local public library to give a talk. As a gift to the library for being such good hosts, she donated a signed copy of The Chamber of Secrets. Unfortunately, there’s some bad news. The library’s signed copy – valued at $2,600 - was stolen before it had a chance to be displayed in the children’s reading room! Tell students that their local police/sheriff’s department has asked for their help in solving the case. As junior detectives, they are going to examine the evidence, interview suspects, and make a recommendation for arrest.
Junior Detective Training 101

3. If the class is joined by a law enforcement official, introduce that person and tell the students that he/she will be there to help with the investigation. If possible, pre-arrange to have the law enforcement official set up the crime scenario for more believability. He/she can also provide a brief introduction at this point about the work of detectives and law enforcement in general, as well as provide some tips and advice for students as they prepare to serve as “junior detectives.”

4. Print and distribute or project the attached Detective’s Dictionary from Scholastic. Review the terms with students. (Teachers seeking a more lengthy activity can provide students with the attached blank version of the Detective’s Dictionary handout and have students use the library’s dictionaries to define them.)

5. Next, distribute the attached “Detective Notes” handout to each student. They will use this handout to write down information about the evidence they examine as well as information collected during interviews with the suspects. Review the handout and answer any questions before dividing students into groups. Depending on class size, teachers can divide groups into partners of two or investigation teams (3-5 students to a group).

Investigating the Crime Scene

6. Before allowing students to examine the crime scene, inform them that the Crime Scene Investigators have combed the scene for forensic evidence and they found the following: two different colored fibers, blood stains, broken glass from the picture frame, a coffee cup with a fingerprint on it, and two other finger prints on the table. Instruct students not to touch anything behind the crime scene tape because the CSI team is still processing it for evidence.

7. Provide students with 6-10 minutes to examine the crime scene, take notes, and to discuss the evidence with their partners/teams. Circulate throughout the room to ensure that students are staying on task and to answer any questions. If a law enforcement official is there, encourage students to ask them questions about the crime scene. Questions to pose to students as they work include:
   - What do you first notice/see?
   - What seems odd or out of place?
   - What do you think is important?
   - What questions do you have in general?
   - What specific persons might you want to bring in for questioning and why? What questions do you want to ask them?

8. After students have had time for their initial observations of the crime scene, stop them and let them report their thoughts out to the entire group. Pose follow up questions to encourage further critical thinking. If there are any details of the crime scene that students have missed, ask probing questions to draw their attention to such clues. Teachers can also have the law enforcement officer comment on procedural issues such as crime scene contamination, attention to detail, etc. Finally, ask students to share who they might want to bring in for questioning and why.

9. Let students know (or if possible, have the officer announce) that based upon the preliminary investigation, the police have determined 4 suspects: the Library Director, the Children’s Librarian, the Reference Librarian, and the Acquisitions Librarian. Tell students that they will spend 5-6 minutes interviewing each suspect. They should ask the questions listed as well as any other questions they think are important. Student should complete their notebooks during their interviews.

This lesson plan was created by Carolina K-12 and the Chapel Hill Public Library as part of the “Doing Democracy: Civic Engagement & Education at the Public Library” project, made possible by funding from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) as administered by the State Library of North Carolina, a division of the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (IMLS grant number LS-00-17-0034-17).
10. Divide the class in to four groups and assign each group a person to interview. After the allotted time, stop the interviews, and ask students to rotate so they have a new suspect to interview. Continue this until every student has had a chance to interview each suspect.

Whodunit?

11. Depending on the time remaining, teachers may wish to give students another opportunity to examine the crime scene. At this point, instruct students to discuss with their partner/team all the evidence they collected and have them make a decision about who they think did it.

12. Once every group has made a decision, read off the list of suspects. By a show of hands, ask each group how they voted and allow them to explain their reasoning. If other groups disagree, allow them to challenge each other’s thinking. Finally, reveal that the library director stole the book. Ideally have the visiting officer handcuff him/her and stand them in front of the students to explain why and how they stole it. Thank your “suspects” for participating and give them a round of applause for their help.

13. Note that even without the confession from the library director, the evidence against them was the strongest. They had three pieces of evidence supporting their guilt: thread from their clothing, fingerprints, and a changing alibi. The acquisitions librarian also thought that they saw you buy the dumpsters throwing something out shortly after the crime occurred.

14. Discuss the following questions to wrap up the CSI activity:
   - What led you to identify the suspect you thought committed the crime?
   - Did you miss any details that would have helped you solve the crime faster or (for those who identified the wrong suspect) more accurately?
   - What was hardest about finding the criminal?
   - Why do you think acquisitions librarian’s blood was found at the scene, but they didn’t have any cuts on their hand?
     - People can have the same blood type, but to figure out who the blood belonged too, you would need a DNA test.
   - Who did the acquisitions librarian see near the dumpsters?
     - Library Director or the children’s librarian
   - What can that tell you about the reliability of eyewitnesses?
   - What did you learn about police work from this activity? How do you think this compares to actual police work?
   - What did you learn about libraries from this activity?

15. If you invited a law enforcement official, ask them to provide feedback regarding the simulation:
   - How did our activity compare to a real investigation?
   - What did our detectives do right? What could they have done better?
   - Have you ever had to respond to a call at the library? What was it for?

16. Teachers should also allow students to ask general questions of the officer at this point. Sample questions might include:
   - What made you want to become a law enforcement officer?
   - What qualities are important for a person to have if they want to work in law enforcement?
   - What are the most important roles that law enforcement officials serve in our school and community?
   - What do you think is the hardest part of police work?
• Do law enforcement officials ever feel scared?
• What responsibilities do police have when dealing with community members and vice versa?
• Do you think most people really understand your job and the nature of police work? Why or why not?

**Interviewing Library Staff (Optional)**

17. After debriefing the simulation, teachers can open the conversation to student created questions for the library staff. If students have not developed questions, use the following questions to get the discussion started.

• What made you want to work at the library?
• What qualities are important for a person to have if they want to work at the library?
• What role does the library serve in our school and community?
• What do you think might be the hardest part of your job?
• What kind of training does your job require?
• What’s your favorite part of your job?
Suggested Crime Scene Map
(The map below pictures how to set up the table. For dramatic effect, use crime scene tape to then surround the table.)

Lay out a piece of yarn/thread of color #1 (to match Library Director’s clothing)

Place a Coffee Cup w/ Acquisitions Librarian “curvy” fingerprint on it on the edge of the table

Scatter “Broken glass” in this area

Drip a small amount of fake blood in this area. Label it as A- using the attached label.

Reference Librarian Blood & fingerprint

Drip a small amount of fake blood in this area. Label it as AB+ using the attached label.

Scatter “Broken glass” in this area

The “Loopy” fingerprint should be visible on one corner of the table.

Yarn/Thread Color #2 that matches Children’s Librarian’s clothing

The “Whirly” fingerprint should be visible on one corner of the table.

In the center of the table, use masking tape or chalk to create an outline of where the framed book was located prior to the theft.

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Suspect Interviews

Questions to ask each subject:
- State your full name for the record.
- What is your job at the library? Can you describe it in 1-2 sentences?
- Where were you when the crime occurred? Can anyone confirm this?
- What do your fingerprints look like?
- What is your blood type?
- Any other questions you think might be important.

Suspect #1: Library Director

Name: __________________________

Job Description: __________________________

Initial Alibi: I was in the break room getting coffee.

Interview Alibi: __________________________

Blood Type: __________________________

Notes: __________________________

Suspect #2: Children's Librarian

Name: __________________________

Job Description: __________________________

Initial Alibi: I was getting hooks in the supply closet.

Interview Alibi: __________________________

Blood Type: __________________________

Notes: __________________________
### SUSPECT #3: REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

**NAME:**

**JOB DESCRIPTION:**

**SHIRT COLOR**

**INITIAL ALIBI**

"I was getting coffee"

**INTERVIEW ALIBI**

**BLOOD TYPE**

**FINGERPRINTS**

**NOTES:**

### SUSPECT #4: ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIAN

**NAME:**

**JOB DESCRIPTION:**

**SHIRT COLOR**

**INITIAL ALIBI**

"I was taking out the trash"

**INTERVIEW ALIBI**

**BLOOD TYPE**

**FINGERPRINTS**

**NOTES:**

### DETECTIVE ___’s Verdict

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*Footsteps at the bottom of the page*
# Detective Case Notes

**Agent ID**

**Location of Crime**

**Date:**

**Sketch of Crime Scene**

**Initial Crime Scene Observations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suspects</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Other Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fingerprint</td>
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<td>Fibers</td>
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<td>Additional Material Evidence</td>
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### Library Director

**Directions:** A crime has been committed at the library. After an initial set of interviews, the police have determined that you are one of the prime suspects. You will sit down with detectives and answer any questions they may have. **You are the person who stole the signed Harry Potter book and you need to try your best to not get caught.** While you are being interviewed by the detectives, **try to not act nervous.** Use the following information and your improvisational skills to answer their questions.

**Job Description:** Library Directors have the main leadership role in the library. Typical duties include preparing and overseeing the budget, developing employment and service policies, strategic planning, public and governmental relations, reporting to the governing board or official, ensuring compliance with laws, fundraising, hiring, motivating and firing staff, and more. Library Directors’ duties and compensation can vary greatly depending on the size of the library. In a small library the director may handle everything from locking the doors to paying the bills. In a large library the director may manage hundreds of employees in many different departments. *If Library Director is your actual job, feel free to ignore this description*

**Shirt Color:** Your shirt color should match one of the “fiber samples” (pieces of yarn/string) found at the crime scene. If they ask you why it’s there, make up a reason.

**Finger Prints:** Your finger print was found at the scene. The facilitator will provide you with a printout fingerprint. If the detectives ask you for your prints, show them the printout. If they ask you why your prints might be there, make a up a reason.

**Alibi:** You initially told the police that you were in the break room getting coffee with the reference librarian.
- If they ask why the reference librarian says he/she was alone in the break room, make up another alibi.
- If they ask why your stories don’t match up, deflect and/or get them to move on to the next question.

**Blood type:** Your blood type is 0- It was not found at the scene.

**Conclusion:** If the detectives figure out who committed the crime (or if the facilitator asks you to reveal yourself), tell the detectives that you stole the book because you’re the world’s biggest Harry Potter fan.

To commit the crime, you hid in a closet in the children’s librarian office and waited for the children’s librarian to leave. Once the children’s librarian left to go to the supply room, you snuck out of the closet, and grabbed the framed book. You accidentally broke the frame when you picked it up. You didn’t clean up the glass because you didn’t want to get your fingerprints everywhere. You threw out the broken frame before the police got there.
**Acquisitions Librarian**

**Directions:** A crime has been committed at the library. After an initial set of interviews, the police have determined that you are one of the prime suspects. You will sit down with detectives and answer any questions they may have. **You did not steal the book. While you are being interviewed by the police, do not act nervous.** Use the following information and your improvisational skills to answer their questions.

**Job Description:** An acquisitions librarian is responsible for purchasing materials like books, electronic resources, videos, games, etc. for a library. *If acquisitions librarian is your actual job, feel free to ignore this description*

**Shirt Color:** Your shirt color should not match one of the “fiber samples” (pieces of yarn/string) found at the crime scene.

**Finger Prints:** Your fingerprint was found at the scene on a coffee cup. The facilitator will provide you with a printout fingerprint. If the detectives ask you for your prints, show them the printout. If they ask you why your fingerprint/coffee cup was there, tell them that you were watching the children’s librarian frame the book before you took out the trash and you must have left it on the table.

**Alibi:** At the time of the crime, you were taking out the trash. As you were walking back inside, you noticed what could have been the library director or children’s librarian throwing something out in the dumpsters.

**Blood type:** Your blood type is AB+. It was found at the scene. If police ask you why, tell them that you’re not sure, you don’t have any fresh cuts on your hands. Show them your hands to prove it. Reaffirm your alibi.

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**Children’s Librarian**

**Directions:** A crime has been committed at the library. After an initial set of interviews, the police have determined that you are one of the prime suspects. You will sit down with detectives and answer any questions they may have. **You did not steal the book. While you are being interviewed by the detectives, act nervous. If the detectives ask you why you’re acting nervous, tell them you’re upset about the book being stolen and whether you might lose your job because of it.** Use the following information and your improvisational skills to answer their questions.

**Job Description:** The children’s librarian plans, promotes and implements special programs for children, generally preschool to sixth grade, using ideas derived from books, other libraries and through personal contact. Prepares and issues flyers and press releases. Periodically confers with school principals and teachers. Covers circulation desk as required, as well as other related library duties. Selects juvenile audiovisual materials. *If children’s librarian is your actual job, feel free to ignore this description*

**Shirt Color:** Your shirt color should match one of the “fiber samples” (pieces of yarn/string) found at the crime scene. If they ask you why it’s there, tell them it’s because you were framing the signed Harry Potter book at the table before you walked away.

**Finger Prints:** Your finger prints were not found at the scene. If they ask you why, tell detectives that you were wearing gloves because you didn’t want to damage the signed book.

**Alibi:** At the time of the crime, you were getting hooks from the supply closet, in order to hang the signed book up in the Children’s section of the library.

**Blood type:** Your blood type is AB+. It was found at the scene. If police ask you why, tell them that when you came back from the supply closet, you saw the broken glass from the frame and tried to clean it up and you cut yourself. (Use a red marker to mimic a cut on your hands and show it to the detectives.)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Reference Librarian</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Directions:</strong> A crime has been committed at the library. After an initial set of interviews, the police have determined that you are one of the prime suspects. You will sit down with detectives and answer any questions they may have. <strong>You did not steal the book.</strong> While you are being interviewed by the police, act nervous. If the detectives ask you why you’re acting nervous, tell them that you’ve never talked to the police before. Use the following information and your improvisational skills to answer their questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Job Description:</strong> A reference librarian is responsible for assisting library patrons in finding information. The ALA describes a research librarian’s duty as organizing reference materials in a system that is easy to access. In addition to providing direct service to patrons, a reference librarian's duties include staying up-to-date on the different types of references available. <em>If reference librarian is your actual job, feel free to ignore this description</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shirt Color:</strong> Your shirt color should not match one of the “fiber samples” (pieces of yarn/string) found at the crime scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finger Prints:</strong> Your finger print was found at the scene. The facilitator will provide you with a printout fingerprint. If the detectives ask you for your prints, show them the printout. If they ask you why your fingerprint was there, tell them that it was probably left there when you were helping the children’s librarian clean up the broken glass from the frame.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alibi:</strong> At the time of the crime, you were in the break room getting coffee, alone. If they ask if the library director was with you, reaffirm that you were alone.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blood type:</strong> Your blood type is A-. It was found at the scene. If police ask you why, tell them that when you came back from the breakroom, you helped the children’s librarian clean up the broken glass and accidentally cut yourself. (Use a red marker to mimic a cut and show it to detectives.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Teacher Instructions:** Print and cut out the attached fingerprints. Distribute the fingerprints as following:
Loopy (Library Director & crime scene), Swirly (Children’s Librarian), Whirly (Reference Librarian & crime scene), Curvy (Acquisitions Librarian & crime scene).

Loopy  Swirly  Whirly  Curvy
**Teacher Instructions:** Cut out the following blood samples and distribute them according to the labels below each sample. The blood types labeled “crime scene” can be placed anywhere in the crime scene. Be sure to remove the labels before distributing.
Name ___________________________

Detective’s Dictionary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alibi</td>
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<td>Clue</td>
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<td>Crime</td>
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<td>Detective</td>
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<td>Evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
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<td>Red herring</td>
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<td>Sleuth</td>
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<td>Suspect</td>
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<td>Victim</td>
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