

**Unit 1: Mystery and Suspense**  
**8<sup>th</sup> Grade Honors Language Arts**  
20 Class Meetings

*Updated October 2025*

**Essential Questions**

- What do strong readers focus on, as they read, to better understand the story?
- How do authors create suspense, and why are we drawn to it?

**Enduring Understandings with Unit Goals**

**EU 1:** Readers are analytical and think critically, using implicit and explicit textual information to make conclusions and inferences that help them solve mysteries.

- Analyze how authors use irony, character interactions, and figurative language to develop a theme.
- Examine how dialogue and specific moments in a story reveal changes in a character or provoke a character's decision.

**EU 2:** Authors use various techniques such as differing points of view, conflict, and irony to build suspense and inspire feelings of worry, fear, and dread in readers.

- Compare and contrast how authors use various literary strategies to build suspense.

**EU 3:** Strong text analysis requires relevant evidence that is thoroughly explained.

- Engage in the writing process using relevant, contextualized evidence and detailed explanations.

**EU 4:** Routinely practiced independent reading builds habitual readers with conscious reading identities, increases reading comprehension skills, and develops vocabulary.

- Engage in consistent independent reading of student-chosen books.
- Actively participate in a supportive reading community that introduces students to a wide range of characters and experiences.

**Standards**

**Common Core State Standards:**

- **RL.8.1:** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RL.8.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **RL.8.3:** Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
- **RL.8.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

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- **RL.8.5:** Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.
- **RL.8.6:** Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.
- **W.8.1:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
  - **W.8.1.A:** Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
  - **W.8.1.B:** Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
  - **W.8.1.C:** Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
  - **W.8.1.D:** Establish and maintain a formal style.
  - **W.8.1.E:** Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
- **W.8.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
  - **W.8.2.A:** Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
  - **W.8.2.B:** Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
  - **W.8.2.C:** Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
  - **W.8.2.D:** Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
  - **W.8.2.E:** Establish and maintain a formal style.
  - **W.8.2.F:** Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.
- **W.8.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **W.8.5:** With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
- **W.8.9:** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- **W.8.10:** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- **SL.8.1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
  - **SL.8.1.A:** Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

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- **SL.8.1.B:** Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
- **SL.8.1.C:** Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.
- **SL.8.1.D:** Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.
- **SL.8.4:** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- **L.8.1:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- **L.8.2:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- **L.8.3:** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
- **L.8.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on *grade 8 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- **L.8.5:** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- **L.8.6:** Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

**ISAAC Vision of the Graduate Competencies**

**Competency 1:** Write effectively for a variety of purposes.

**Competency 2:** Speak to diverse audiences in an accountable manner.

**Competency 3:** Develop the behaviors needed to interact and contribute with others on a team.

**Competency 4:** Analyze and solve problems independently and collaboratively.

**Competency 5:** Be responsible, creative, and empathetic members of the community.

**Unit Content Overview**

- **Reading Literary Texts**
  - **Key Terms:** theme, central idea, main idea, annotate, summarize, characterization, plot, dramatic irony, point of view, support, conclusion, text structure, key details, justify, word choice, inference, author's point of view/message, author's intent/purpose, setting
  - **Vocabulary:** acquire, genial, intrigue, justify, offensive, ruthless, vindictive, bliss, console, diligence, exasperate, feign, hospitality, integrity, motive, mystery, deduce/deduction, suspect, foreshadow, perpetrator, homicide, defendant

**Interdisciplinary Connection:**

- Social Studies: History, Civics, Government

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**Daily Learning Objectives with *TWPS***

**Students will be able to...**

- Build essential background knowledge and vocabulary.
  - *Are mystery stories more interesting when the ending is predictable but satisfying, or unpredictable but shocking?*
- Analyze how an author uses point of view to create suspense.
  - *When you meet someone new, how quickly do you decide whether or not you can trust them? What things (appearance, actions, words) influence your decision?*
- Write a clear, specific, and concise claim that responds to a prompt.
  - *What makes a claim strong or weak?*
- Make inferences about “The Landlady” using supporting evidence as justification.
  - *Which helps you understand a character better: noticing exactly what they say and do, or figuring out what they’re really thinking and feeling?*
- Challenge or build upon others’ ideas using text evidence.
  - *How do you effectively and respectfully challenge someone else’s ideas?*
- Determine a theme or central idea of “Ruthless” that is supported by text evidence.
  - *What do you think makes a story memorable? Is it the characters, the plot, or the theme?*
- Analyze how an author uses internal conflict to develop suspense.
  - *What is internal conflict? Describe two examples of internal conflict.*
- Analyze how internal conflict develops the story’s central theme by examining the barber’s thoughts, actions, and moral dilemma in “Lather and Nothing Else.”
  - *Does true justice require following rules and laws, or following one’s conscience? Explain.*
- Write a complete paragraph that includes a claim, two pieces of evidence, and reasoning.
  - *Why does a complete paragraph need reasoning in addition to evidence?*
- Investigate how an author builds suspense through point of view and setting.
  - *Describe a time when you faced a difficult decision. What options did you consider, and what did you ultimately decide? Looking back, do you think you made the best choice? Why or why not?*
- Connect related media to unit texts.
  - *Describe two examples of suspense that you have seen in a video or movie.*
- Evaluate how the differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience create suspense and humor.
  - *How does an author use dramatic or situational irony to create suspense or humor?*
- Students will analyze how Roald Dahl uses irony and characterization to create suspense and develop the story’s unexpected ending in “Lamb to the Slaughter.”
  - *Is it possible to know what someone is really capable of, even if you think you know them well? Why or why not?*
- Support claims using text evidence from “Lamb to the Slaughter.”
  - *How do authors present evidence in a text?*

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- Present claims with relevant evidence and valid reasoning using appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- Write a literary analysis essay that introduces a claim and organizes evidence logically.
  - *Why is it necessary for an author to not only cite evidence but to thoroughly explain the cited evidence and tie it back to their argument?*
- Evaluate peer essays and provide specific, actionable feedback.
  - *What makes feedback effective?*
- Develop and strengthen writing by revising, editing, and rewriting, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
  - *What is the hardest part about revising your own writing?*
- Engage effectively in a collaborative discussion using Accountable Talk and text evidence.
  - *What makes an accountable talk discussion successful? What does it sound like and look like?*

**Instructional Strategies/Differentiated Instruction**

- Whole group instruction
- Guided notes
- Paragraph frames and sentence starters
- Student-led instruction
- Teacher modeling
- Written feedback
- Think-pair-share and small-group discussions
- Graphic organizers
- Cornell notes
- Accountable talk
- Homework
- Word walls with visuals
- Anchor charts
- Small group instruction
- Conferencing
- Text and video chunking with guiding questions
- Close reading with text-dependent questions

**EL Differentiated Instruction:**

- Explicit modeling
- Guided and independent practice
- Small group instruction
- Strategic grouping
- Key vocabulary
- Graphic organizers
- KWL charts
- Venn diagrams

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- Sequence writing
- Reinforcing contextual definition
- Predicting and inferring
- Glossaries
- Sentence starters
- Word bank
- Verbal prompting

**Assessments**

**FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:**

- TWPS
- Student discussions and responses
- Exit Tickets
- Accountable Talk Discussions
- Completed notes
- Completed graphic organizers
- Homework
- Text dependent question responses
- Close reading notes and text annotations
- In-class work
- Verbal check-ins
- Vocabulary checks
- Frayer Model
- Unit Task- Literary Analysis Essay
  - Teacher Created Scoring Guide

**SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:**

- Quiz 1 (EU 1, EU 2)
- Quiz 2 (EU 1, EU 2)
- Unit Task- Literary Analysis Essay (Scoring Guide)
- Unit 1 Test (IAB: Read Literary Texts)

**Unit Task**

**Unit Task Name:** Literary Analysis Essay

**Description:** In this task, students will write a literary analysis essay that addresses the prompt: Compare and contrast how authors build suspense in a short story. Students will compare “Lamb to the Slaughter” and another short story we read in class to examine how authors use literary elements to build reader’s interest and suspense. Students will use relevant evidence from both texts to support their response and thoroughly explain how their evidence ties to their claim. (EU1, EU2) After

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peer and self-review, students will revise their writing, demonstrating their ability to effectively incorporate feedback to improve their writing. (EU 3).

**Evaluation:** Teacher Created Scoring Guide & Essay Rubric

**Unit Resources**

- “Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving
- “The Monkey’s Paw” by W.W. Jacobs
- “Button, Button ” by Richard Matheson
- “Lather and Nothing Else” by Hernando Tellez
- “Ruthless” by William DeMille (Commonlit)
- “The Landlady” by Roald Dahl (Commonlit)
- “Lamb to the Slaughter” by Roald Dahl (Commonlit)
- “Lamb to the Slaughter” pre-reading materials
- Commonlit 360 Curriculum Materials
- Discussion Skill Materials
- Discussion Tracker
- Literary Analysis Planning Materials
- Literary Analysis Essay Scoring Guide
- SBAC Prep Materials
- IAB Resource Materials
- Pear Assessment