

# The Dead Kid Detective Agency by Evan Munday

## Teacher Resource Guide

Teacher Resource Guide developed by Eleanor Creasey, B.Ed., M.Ed.



*The Dead Kid Detective Agency* offers teachers and students an opportunity to explore the mystery genre, point of view in writing, vocabulary, some ghostly activities, and certain aspects of Canadian history, while engaging in a great whodunit led by October Schwartz, a precocious almost thirteen-year-old who has recently moved to Stickville, the scene of the crime.

In this resource, several activities are suggested as possibilities for working with the text in the middle school (grades five through eight) grades. This novel would also be an excellent read aloud for students in grades three and four and each of the suggested activities can be modified depending on the level of the students, their learning needs, and the depth of exploration chosen by the teacher.

### 1. Predictions

Prior to reading *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*, guide the process of prediction by using some of the following discussion possibilities:

- ✓ What do you know about mystery novels?
- ✓ What mysteries have you read?
- ✓ What did you like about the mysteries you have read?
- ✓ What did the mysteries have in common?
- ✓ What do you think this book will be about when you read the title?
- ✓ Examine the illustration on the front cover. What do you see? What does the illustration tell you? When you examine the illustration, what do you think this book will be about?
- ✓ There is a Billy Joel quote used in the epigraph. It says “Only the good die young.” What do you think this quote means and how do you think it will play into the mystery you are about to read?
- ✓ Read the back cover. What do you learn here to confirm or change what you thought when you looked at the front cover?

Once these discussions have taken place, it is helpful for students to start a KWL chart so that they can document what they think they already know and so they can wonder further about what will happen in the book. At this point in the study, they will complete the first two columns based on the discussions that have been held surrounding the above questions.

K What I Know	W What I Would Like To Know	L What I Learned

Let the students know that completing this chart will be an ongoing part of their study and reading, and ask them to add to the “What I Learned” column as they discover details that answer their questions or that present new learning or information to them as they read.

## 2. Exploring the Text

### Vocabulary

In his writing, Evan Munday uses a multitude of words that provide a challenge for the reader. Here are some possibilities for working with these words.

#### *Make Your Own Crossword Puzzle*

It is suggested that you do one together as a class first, and then assign each group of two students two or three chapters from which to choose words to make their own crossword puzzle. The culminating activity would be to trade puzzles within the class so students could be exposed to the meanings of as many new words as possible.

Words from Chapters One through Three might be:

translucent, p. 38	moseyed, p. 14
dolefully, p. 9	obsession, p. 15
rhetorically, p. 10	decipher, p. 16
symposium, p. 10	hordes, p. 16
prodigious, p. 10	decapitation, p. 16
minions, p. 10	bedraggled, p. 17
decorum, p. 11	cryptically, p. 17
gesticulating, p. 12	valiant, p. 17
advisement, p. 13	allegedly, p. 17
resurrection, p. 17	affinity, p. 7
assiduously, p. 38	unseemly, p. 8
insinuation, p. 40	gaggle, p. 9
vile, p. 13	oration, p. 13

#### Steps to Follow for Making a Crossword Puzzle

1. Choose 25 words.
2. Make a 25 x 25 grid in Word.
3. Print three copies of the grid.
4. On one copy, print each word, putting one letter in each square.
5. Cut out these words.
6. Using the cut out words and the second grid copy, place the words on the grid, such that crosswords are used; in other words, that letters overlap appropriately. This may take some juggling.
7. Glue the words onto the blank grid.
8. Add numbers. From the top across and down, number “across” numbers and “down” numbers.
9. On the third copy of the grid, shade all the squares that will not be used. Number the blank spaces as you have in the draft you have already made.
10. Arrange the words as to “Across” and “Down” and in number order to form a “clues” section below the final grid.
11. Look up a definition for each word and include it in the “clues” section that you have added following the puzzle grid.
12. Remove the words and leave the definitions.

Your crossword puzzle is now ready to challenge a colleague!

#### *Context Clues*

Learning the meaning of a word from its context (the examination of the parts of the sentence surrounding the word) is one way to find meaning. Below are ten sentences from *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*. The page number on which each appears is in parentheses following the sentence. Read each sentence and then, using the context of the underlined word, including the sentences around the word if necessary, make an educated guess about the meaning of the word. Following completion of this exercise, discuss as a class to confirm the meaning, using a dictionary if required.

1. “No!” October almost shouted. His insinuation she was goofing off by doing other schoolwork offended her deeply. (p. 40)  
Insinuation means \_\_\_\_\_

2. "I've made a lot of notes, but I should preface everything by saying I very much enjoyed the book." (p. 53)  
Preface means \_\_\_\_\_
3. "She had to admit that imagining the same ghost twice seemed improbable." (p. 63)  
Improbable means \_\_\_\_\_
4. "Mr. Page started telling all the anecdotes he knew about my curling coach and French teacher." (p. 75)  
Anecdotes means \_\_\_\_\_
5. "Presents," I explained. "They're board games . . . for you. I figured you'd get bored in this cemetery all the time." The dead kids looked skeptical. (p. 110)  
Skeptical means \_\_\_\_\_
6. "A little walking and a litany of complaints later, the three arrived at 533 Arthur Lane." (p. 144)  
Litany means \_\_\_\_\_
7. "Alyosha must have found that a plausible explanation, because no other questions followed." (p. 148)  
Plausible means \_\_\_\_\_
8. "If she was caught sneaking out the very night after she'd been reprimanded, her dad would be hurt and insulted, and October couldn't fathom the punishment that would result." (p. 187)  
Fathom means \_\_\_\_\_
9. "So, what're ye going to do?" asked Morna, not the least bit fazed that she was nearly touching knees with me, a bona fide lunatic." (p. 245)  
Bona fide means \_\_\_\_\_
10. "Regardless," Dr. Lagostina said, interrupting a real bonding experience. "We feel these . . . tendencies . . . only amplify when the two of you are together." (p. 252)  
Amplify means \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Ghostly Terms***

Choose several words from the novel on the ghostly theme and ask students to create their own small dictionary. They may use a dictionary or the internet to help with the definitions. Remind them that dictionaries are in alphabetical order. Giving them a small booklet to help capture these definitions is motivating, and they will also enjoy creating an illustrated cover page for their dictionary. Some words from *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* to use in this activity might be:

*ghoulish, ghost, morbid, exorcists, vampires, zombies, poltergeist, spirits, demons, Dark Arts, supernatural, spooky, phantom.*

Students might be invited to add their own "ghostly terms" as the reading progresses.

### Mystery Guide for *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*

Reading and studying this book offers an opportunity to learn about the mystery genre in literature. Developing a “handbook” as the reading proceeds can help the reader to learn more about the mystery genre and to see how *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* aligns with this genre. This could be a whole class activity with the “handbook” on chart paper to be added to on an ongoing basis, or it could be completed as an individual project with each student having his/her own booklet to complete each time they find examples from the story that fit the genre. If a booklet is made, the basic information could be on one side of the page and the examples from *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* could be on the facing page. Here is a sample of what might be included:

Mystery Genre	<i>The Dead Kid Detective Agency</i>
mysterious death or crime to be solved	_____
suspect #1	_____
motive	_____
opportunity	_____
suspect #2	_____
motive	_____
opportunity	_____
suspect #3	_____
motive	_____
opportunity	_____
central character who eventually solves the mystery	_____
overt clues about the crime	_____
hidden evidence — essential details are offered in such a way that they seem unimportant	_____
suspense — having to hold various possible conclusions at bay as you wait to see what happens	_____
foreshadowing — clues left by author as to possible outcomes	_____
red herring — a kind of foreshadowing clue that leads the reader to false conclusions	_____

## Interesting Features

*The Dead Kid Detective Agency* includes some techniques that help to engage the reader and to draw the reader into the story. Included below are some of the features and some suggestions for discussions and other activities to allow students to understand and work with these features.

1. The author speaks directly to the reader on a number of occasions. Some examples of this can be found on pages 143, 145, 195, and 248. On page 143, for example, the text reads:  
“Are you following this, kids?”

If the book is being used as a read aloud, these would be logical places to stop and verbally check for understanding. If the book is being read silently, the reader is invited to do this check for himself/herself as the reading takes place.

This device is a good one to discuss with readers. Questions to be considered would include:

- ✓ How do you feel as a reader when the author writes in this way?
- ✓ Does this type of writing change your understanding of the story?
- ✓ Do you think it adds something to the story when the author does this?

2. The author alternates between two points of view throughout the story. These points of view are first person (with October as the narrator) and third person. Alternating chapters are written from each point of view. When October tells the story, the reader is able to understand or feel closer to October’s perspective. When the third person point of view is used, the reader receives external, objective, factual information about the goings on.

One way to work with point of view in writing would be to take a short paragraph from each point of view and try changing it to the other. Here is one example.

written in first person (from p. 23):

“We’d moved to Sticksville from our old town because my dad had a nervous breakdown at school. I liked where we lived, but there was no way Dad could teach there after he flipped out in chemistry class and smashed a whole bunch of beakers and test tubes and stuff in front of the whole class. Nobody got hurt — my dad couldn’t hurt anyone — but he got fired.”

changed to third person:

“They had moved to Sticksville from their old town because October’s dad had a nervous breakdown at school. October liked where they lived, but there was no way Mr. Schwartz could teach there after he flipped out in chemistry class and smashed a whole bunch of beakers and test tubes and stuff in front of the whole class. Nobody got hurt — Mr. Schwartz couldn’t hurt anyone — but he got fired.”

Teachers could choose other sections from the novel and have students try to change from one perspective to the other in their own writing.

A follow up class discussion around this could include these questions:

- ✓ As a reader, what point of view makes you feel most involved in the story?
- ✓ Why do you think Evan Munday alternated points of view as he told the story in *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*?
- ✓ What point of view do you think is most effective in a mystery and why?

3. As the author develops the exposition he adds three diary entries and alternates them with the chapters so that the reader also becomes engaged in the diary of Henri LaFleur.
  - ✓ What effect does this have on the rising action of the story?
  - ✓ What does the reader think when Henri LaFleur is identified?
4. Evan Munday uses illustrations in the story. Here are some questions to consider about these illustrations:

- ✓ How do these illustrations enhance the story?
- ✓ How do they support the reader's understanding of events in the story?
- ✓ Do you like these illustrations as part of this mystery novel? Why or why not?

### 3. Extending the Text

#### *Postcards from the Past*

In this activity the writer (student) chooses an historical period or event represented by one of the five dead kids. The writer checks back in the text to find mention of the chosen event and what is said about the involvement of the dead kid involved. Key highlights from the period or event are researched and noted through internet research. Next, the writer then assumes the identity of one of the five dead kids and writes a postcard to himself/herself in which he/she discusses a feature of that historical period. The postcard is signed by the appropriate dead kid. When the writing on the postcard has been completed, the student illustrates the other side of the postcard in a way that is consistent with the message.

Possible historical periods/events:

- ✓ American Revolution, United Empire Loyalists — postcard from Cyril Cooper
- ✓ Canadian Immigration Wave 1910 — postcard from Morna MacIsaac
- ✓ Underground Railroad — postcard from Tabettha Scott
- ✓ Dionne Quintuplets — postcard from Kirby LaFlamme
- ✓ Mohawk Warrior Standoff at Oka, Quebec, 1990 — postcard from Derek Running Water

#### *News Article*

Awareness of details surrounding the FLQ Crisis in Canada in the late 1960s will help the reader to interpret Henri LaFleur's place in *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*. Students can find the facts through internet research and then use these facts to write a news article. In order to be able to write an effective news article, the following guidelines should be shared with students and followed by them:

- ✓ **Headline:** a short, attention-getting statement about the event
- ✓ **Byline:** tells who wrote the story
- ✓ **Lead Paragraph:** contains the 5 W's — who, what, when, where, why — and the one H — how. The writer finds the answers to these questions and includes them in the opening paragraph.
- ✓ **Explanation:** up to two further paragraphs containing other information the reader might want to know

Students should be told to visualize a triangle, with the most important information in the lead paragraph and information that is of lesser importance later on in the article.

#### *Diary*

The diary entries by Henri LaFleur could be a stepping stone to discuss diaries and to have students write a diary entry about something in their lives. Guidelines for a diary entry include:

- ✓ Write in chronological order.
- ✓ Write entries in the first person.
- ✓ Make entries detailed, but avoid over-describing.
- ✓ Talk about events that involve yourself or your familiar close friends. Avoid talking about strangers or events in which you were not involved.
- ✓ Include your emotions in your diary. Write down why you are sad or happy.

#### *Poetry Writing*

Poetry writing can be an effective and fun way to explore characters and events in a story.

- ✓ Limericks are humorous, light, five line verses that use the AABBA rhyme scheme. Following instruction on the limerick form, students could choose a character from the story and write their own limerick. Here is an example:

There once was a sleuth named Schwartz,  
October was twelve say reports;  
With dead kids in hand,  
She scoured the land,  
The murderer spent time in the courts.

- ✓ Cinquains are five line poems that do not rhyme. The first line contains a subject, the second line contains two descriptive words (adjectives), the third line contains three action words (verbs), the fourth line contains a phrase or sentence describing the subject, and the fifth line contains a word that means something similar to the subject. Again, following instruction on this form, students could choose a character and write their own cinquain. Here is an example:

October  
Curious, precocious  
Seeking, writing, snooping  
She solved the mystery.  
Sleuth