

Dial "M" for Morna

The Dead Kid Detective Agency #2

by Evan Munday

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



Dial "M" for Morna is the second in Evan Munday's *The Dead Kid Detective Agency* series. As did the first book in the series, this book offers teachers and students the opportunity to explore the mystery genre, some great vocabulary, interesting settings, and another captivating whodunit starring girl detective October Schwartz. For those who have not yet read the Silver Birch Award–nominated first book in the series, *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*, it is recommended that you and your students consider reading it first to appropriately set the context for this second mystery.

In this resource, several activities are suggested as possibilities for working with the text in middle school grades five through eight. This novel would also be a good read-aloud for the middle school and younger grades, and each of the activities could be modified depending on the level of the students, their learning needs, and the depth of exploration chosen by the teacher. Some of the activities presented here are similar to those suggested in the Teacher Resource Guide for the first book, but others present new and different challenges.

1. Predictions

Prior to reading *Dial "M" for Morna* as a class, guide the predictions 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 did you like about the first book in this series, *The Dead Kid Detective Agency*?
- 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? Who 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 Carly Rae Jepsen quote used in the epigraph. It says "Call me, maybe." What do you think this quote means and how do you think it might 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 they can document what they think they already know, as well as wondering further about what will happen in the book. At this point in the study, they will complete the first two columns based on the discussion that has been held surrounding the above questions and their own questions and ideas.

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

A KWL Chart

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. This chart can be referred to throughout the reading of the book as new information and insights become available, and could be a good forum for class discussions.

2. Exploring the Text

Vocabulary

In his writing, Evan Munday uses a multitude of words that provide a grand opportunity for the reader to expand his or her vocabulary. The following project is presented as one way of working with the words in this novel.

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:

cartography, p. 7	magnitude, p. 12	implausible, p. 29
affixed, p. 8	pervosity, p. 13	sociopath, p. 34
digitized, p. 8	derision, p. 13	arcane, p. 36
deception, p. 9	dirges, p. 15	distraught, p. 37
gullible, p. 9	adept, p. 16	tricorn, p. 38
ghoul, p. 9	deterrent, p. 17	sidelong, p. 40
fray, p. 11	cryptic, p. 25	corporeal, p. 41
penchant, p. 11	conduit, p. 29	consensus, p. 43
ominous, p. 11		

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. Once you have decided, these may be taped or glued to this second grid.
7. In pencil, print the words on the blank grid (the third one), being careful to put them in the right spaces.
8. Add numbers. From the top, across and down, number “Across” words and “Down” words.
9. On the third copy of the grid (the one with the words in pencil), shade all the squares that will not be used.
10. Erase the words that you have printed in pencil, being careful to leave the numbers un-erased.
11. Arrange the words under the headings “Across” and “Down” and in number order to form a “Clues” section below the final grid.
12. Look up a definition for each word and include it in the “Clues” section beside the correct word. Continue to work in pencil!
13. Erase the words and leave the definitions.

Your crossword puzzle is now ready to challenge a colleague!

Character

Character Sketch

Write a character sketch about October Schwartz. In several paragraphs discuss the following:

- Who is October and what is her role in the story?
- What are her goals?
- Why is she important in the story?
- Is she a protagonist or antagonist?
- What do you like or dislike about October Schwartz and why?
- Summarize the outcome of the story as it relates to October. Did she achieve her goals?

Remember to use evidence from the story to support your character sketch.

Interview Development

Each group of two chooses a character from the story: October Schwartz, Morna MacIssac, Yumi Takeshi, or Ms. Fenstermacher. The group develops ten questions they would like to ask their character. They then write the answers they think their character would give to these questions. All of this is to be based on what they know of the character and how she acts in the story. When the questions and answers have been developed, the group

turns them into an interview. One group member is the interviewer and the other is the character. The interview is presented to the class and the written portion submitted to the teacher. Teachers may choose to assess students on the process of working in a group, the quality of questions and answers, and the oral presentation.

Setting

Sketching Settings

Evan Munday describes a number of locations in the story. He uses strong and evocative terms and phrases to paint a picture in the reader's mind.

In the first activity, students are asked to respond to some of these settings by drawing them. Two descriptive passages are highlighted below, and, for each, students are asked to sketch the described location during the reading of the book. There are many descriptive passages in this novel, and students might even have a sketch journal to record their impressions as the reading progresses. Teachers might use this opportunity to offer students some instruction on sketching.



Setting 1 (Chapter 2, p. 23)

At Turnbull Lane's end stood the Crooked Arms, facing an empty, garbage-strewn lot. Three storeys tall, I could see where the building had picked up its name....I noticed a large sign planted in the brown grass and weeds that revealed the house was scheduled for demolition early in January. Getting into a soon-to-be-demolished building proved difficult. I had to hop over piles and piles of junk, and not just newspapers or plastic bottles — rusted old tricycles or wooden skids....Even the porch itself was a minor obstacle, with its rotted wooden boards encircled by a plastic orange fencework warning of the ghostly walk-up's looming demolition.

Setting 2 (Chapter 2, p. 24)

A short front hallway opened into a little lobby-like area, complete with front desk and grandfather clock, both festooned with cobwebs like tinsel around a Christmas tree....From the front lobby, heavy wooden doors led to separate rooms in both directions, and dead ahead, a wooden staircase, with steps collapsed and some altogether missing, led to the murk above. The strangest thing (aside from how many spiders now seemed to live in the building) was that all the furniture I could see — the desk, the clock, an armchair, even an umbrella stand by the stairs — was tagged with an orange receipt of some kind.

A second activity for setting would involve the students choosing a particular setting and making their own diorama depicting the setting. Again, there is great detail in Munday's writing, and students would attempt to capture this detail in their dioramas.

What's in a Mystery?

Reading and studying this book offers an opportunity to learn about the mystery genre in literature. Developing a “mystery cube” as the reading proceeds, or as a culminating activity, can help the readers learn more about the mystery genre and understand how *The Dead Kid Detective Agency: Dial “M” for Morna* aligns with this genre. Following a class discussion, students should collect information under the following headings: Setting, Detective, Crime or Mystery, Victim, Clues, and Solution. Find a six-sided cube template (there are many available on the Internet) and have this available for students. Once the information is collected, students should edit it so it will fit the small spaces on the cube, and they should then proceed to make their own cube. Encourage them to complete the cubes in an artistic manner, with appropriate illustrations and designs. When assembled, the cubes can be used to decorate the classroom.

3. Interesting Features

The author alternates between two points of view in the story. These points of view are first person (with October as narrator) and third person. 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. Teachers should point this out to the students and have the students locate the different points of view in the different chapters. This could be followed up by a class discussion based on these questions:

- As a reader, what point of view makes you feel more involved in the story?
- Why do you think Evan Munday chose to alternate points of view in this story?
- What point of view do you think is more effective in a mystery and why?

Evan Munday uses a number of illustrations in his story. Here are some questions to consider about these illustrations:

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



Yumi suggests the use of a mnemonic device (p. 96) to help her friends remember her phone number. Her phone number is 868-5309 and the device she suggests is TOTL-FOX. A mnemonic device is a learning technique to aid memory or a memory device. An interesting pursuit would be to explore mnemonic devices and perhaps create a class list or poster of those considered helpful. Another example of a mnemonic device is “ROY G. BIV,” which is often used to help students remember the order of colors in the rainbow: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet.

- Students could be invited to create their own mnemonic devices to help them remember information of importance to them.

Dial “M” For Morna ends with a cliffhanger. A cliffhanger is a dilemma, revelation or twist in the turn of events that keeps the reader eager to find out what happens next. What is the cliffhanger ending in this novel?

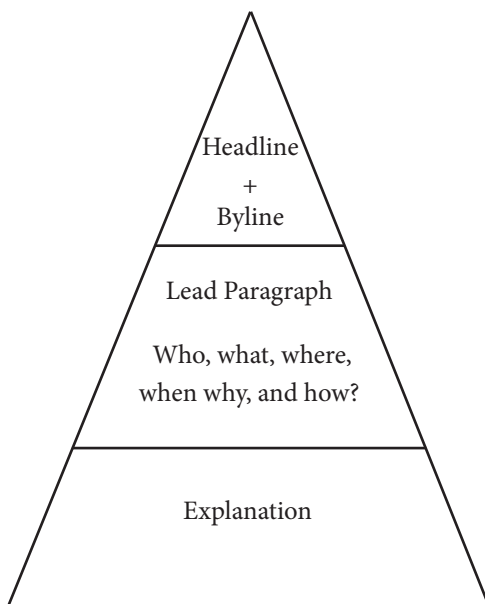
- Using the cliffhanger ending in this novel as a model, teachers could discuss this method with students and devise writing projects and practices to include the notion of cliffhangers.

4. Extending the Text

Editorial and News Article Writing

Munday mentions the head tax that was applied to Chinese immigrants to Canada at one point in our history. Additionally, in the story, October's friend Yumi was the victim of racial intolerance. Both of these issues would be useful in working with students on the difference between fact and opinion, and how these are represented in news formats. It is important that students understand that a news article consists of facts only, and that they must avoid bias, personal and possibly unreasoned judgment.

The following guidelines for a news article 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.

In an editorial, a person takes a stand and gives his/her opinion or position about the situation. It is important to remember that, in expressing one's opinion, one must avoid a written statement that could be considered to convey an unjustly unfavorable impression (libel).

A useful assignment would be to have students write both a news article and an editorial about either racial intolerance or the head tax. They should research to gain the facts and then write the two types of pieces for the same topic. Helpful discussions could ensue as the group compares and contrasts the two types of writing.

Debate

Throughout the story, it is evident that there is some difference of opinion in the community regarding racial tolerance. This is evident when Yumi, who is a Canadian citizen, is repeatedly taunted and attacked with reference to her Japanese background.

A debate is a formal discussion on a particular topic in which opposing sides are put forward. Take this opportunity to teach middle school students a little about the debate process. Some basic debate terms would include resolution, affirmative team, negative team, rebuttal, judges, and opinion (based on example, common sense, expert, statistics).

A formal debate process would include the formation of teams, consideration of the resolution, selecting sides,

speech one (first argument of the affirmative), speech two (first argument of the negative), speech three (second argument of the affirmative), speech four (second argument of the negative), short break to prepare rebuttal, speech five (negative team presents rebuttals to affirmative team's arguments and summarizes own arguments), speech six (affirmative team presents rebuttals to negative team's arguments and summarizes own arguments), and judge chooses winner.

A resolution might be: "Be it resolved that there is no place for racial intolerance in Canadian society and culture."

Research

Several important events or people in Canadian history are mentioned in the story. Students choose one of the following events and research it. They then present their research in one of the following formats: poster, written report, PowerPoint presentation, poem, or play:

- Alexander Graham Bell
- The Great Depression
- The Suffragette Movement
- Chinese Head Tax
- World War One