MARY WEBBER

Learning with Murder Mysteries: An EFL Curriculum

Rationale

This curriculum incorporates many approaches to language learning including Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), but this rationale will mainly focus on three aspects of this curriculum: goal setting, using games, and creating digital stories for language learning.

Goal Setting

This curriculum incorporates student-driven goal setting in learning outcomes, reading activities, and in differentiation. The students begin the unit by setting goals that are appropriately challenging for them. This naturally allows for differentiation as students are pursuing personal goals; students with a strong grasp on the language can create more advanced language goals for themselves, while students who are struggling can focus their goals on skills they are having a hard time with. This goal setting allows students to regulate their own learning and have a measure of metacognitive awareness of their own language learning (Bursali & Oz, 2018). Studies have shown that using self-regulating learning strategies, like goal setting, "improve students' academic performance in EFL and other courses" and that self-regulatory learners have "intrinsic interest and self-efficacy" in their language learning, allowing "successful language learning [to] occur" (Cakiroglu & Ozturk, 2020, p. 26) (Cakiroglu & Ozturk, 2020, p. 25) (Bursali & Oz, 2018, p. 668). In short, goal setting helps students take ownership of their learning and, ultimately, improve their language learning outcomes.

Learning with Games

The midway point of the unit outlined in this curriculum is *Whodunit: A Murder Mystery Game*, a purpose-built interactive murder mystery that incorporates several different learning technologies, as well as incorporating reading, listening, and speaking activities. The game is meant to be played collaboratively as students hunt through the clues and solve the mystery. This style of game incorporates "languageing," where students use "social interaction to 'talk through' comprehension problems" and "negotiate meaning" (Reinhardt, 2018, p.100). The game has several affordances, it is collaborative which creates an opportunity for "meaningful, social language," it creates an opportunity for students to showcase their ability to support claims with evidence, and it creates opportunity for vocabulary learning. The students collaboratively create a digital word wall to crowd-source vocabulary support, and the vocabulary is encountered in context. "Vocabulary is most effectively remembered in semantically related groupings, and L2 learning happens when words are used in meaningful, goal-focused ways," so because the vocabulary is related to the murder mystery genre, and the students must understand the vocabulary to achieve their goal of solving the mystery, the game provides ample opportunities for meaningful vocabulary learning (Reindhardt, 2018, p.94).

Digital Storytelling

This unit concludes with a digital storytelling project. Past studies have shown that digital storytelling projects have helps students "improve their digital literacy, reading and writing literacies, and their critical thinking skills" (Mirza, 2020, p.91). It has also shown to improve student attitudes toward technology-based learning practices (Balaman, 2020). This digital storytelling project goes even further because the language requirements are driven by the learning goals of each student in the project. This means there is not only an opportunity for students to share their language learning, but to teach what they have learned to their fellow

group members. This digital storytelling project gives the students an opportunity to incorporate

creativity, build digital literacy, support their fellow students' learning, and share their own

learning in a fun, interesting way.

Context

       This curriculum is designed for an undergraduate EFL course, specifically a 200-300

level course that uses films and other cultural touchstones to teach English. The students would

most likely be between 18-24 and would have around an A2-B2 level of English. The curriculum

is designed to be a department resource that instructors use to guide their lesson planning and

teaching.

Curriculum

Unit Overview
This unit focuses on students pursuing individual language learning goals, forming and supporting arguments, and producing original writing—all through the lens of mystery stories. The unit starts with students setting grammar goals, which will focus their reading and writing activities for the remainder of the unit. Then students select short mystery stories they will read/listen to while focusing on finding the claim (solution) and evidence (clues) in the mystery, as well as searching for authentic examples of the grammar features they are studying for their goals. There unit creates many opportunities for students to create language resources for themselves and each other. The unit then goes on to include a murder mystery game that gives students the opportunity to actively use their knowledge of claims and evidence, as well as their new knowledge of the mystery genre. The unit concludes with students using their knowledge of the genre, the new grammar features they have learned, and their ability to support claims with evidence as they create digital mystery stories and share them with the class.

Learning Outcomes
- Students will recognize claims and supporting evidence in texts   - Students will understand the main message and supporting details in texts   - Students will form arguments with claims and supporting elements   - Students will set, pursue, and collect evidence for personal language learning goals   - Students will create original fiction stories   - Students will use technology to create shared language resources   - Students will use technology to create and present digital products   - Students will collaborate to complete meaningful tasks

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Standards
ACTFL Can-Do Statements: - I can understand the main message and supporting details on a wide variety of familiar and general interest topics across various time frames from complex, organized texts that are spoken, written, or signed.   - I can follow the main story and some supporting detail across major time frames in fictional texts.   - I can give detailed presentations on a variety of familiar topics and some concrete topics I have researched, using a few short paragraphs, often across various time frames.   TESOL Technology Standards: - Language learners use technology-based productivity tools as aids in comprehension   - Language learners use technology-based productivity tools collaboratively and individually in order to enhance their language learning competence   - Language learners use available technology individually or collaboratively to create content to share with peers or a wider audience   - Language learners demonstrate the ability to set language learning goals and objectives that employ technology, with a teacher's support or independently   - Language learners can express themselves using technology   - Language learners use technology to work in English more effectively

Evidence of Learning
- Students will set goals and return evidence of how they have or have not achieved those goals   - Student-generated anchor charts of language/grammar features   - Student flip videos of claim and evidence from *Whodunit*   - Digital story product   - Digital story presentation   - Teacher observation of students during collaborative work in class

Suggested Resources
• [Collections of short mystery stories on archive.org](#): The link provided is for eBook collections of short stories by Agatha Christie, but it is also possible to search for audio files in the archive. There are several examples of audio recordings of Sherlock Holmes stories available.) • [Beelinguapp](#): This is a free app with stories in multiple genres, including mysteries. The app's main feature is audiobooks combined with written texts in the user's target and native languages, displayed concurrently on a split screen. • [Padlet](#): Digital "wall" where students and teachers can post information. Can be used for daily questions and answers, student and teacher-made anchor charts, etc. • An Introduction to English Grammar by Gerald Nelson and Sidney Greenbaum (book). • Possible digital storytelling tools: [Flip](#), [Canva](#), PowerPoint, [Flipsnack](#), [Voicethread](#), [Storybird](#), [Podbean](#), [Screencastify](#) • [Whodunit: A Murder Mystery Game](#) • OneNote Classroom: If it is available, OneNote Classroom allows students to have shared workspaces and students/teachers can create anchor charts to share and store digitally. • Mystery Movies: *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Death on the Nile, Knives Out, Clue*, etc.

Differentiation	
Scaffolds	• Sentence stems • Pre-selecting short stories for clarity • Pre-teaching vocabulary for *Whodunit* • Encouraging students to use class-created resources • Peer support through collaborative work • Support students in setting reasonable goals for their personal language development
Extensions	• Support students setting goals for their personal language development • Pre-select more advanced or longer short stories

Tips for Success
• Assign Beelinguapp mystery stories as homework for students, or strongly encourage students use the app independently • PowerPoint has an in-built feature that can record screen and audio if students want to make an audiobook on PowerPoint for their digital storytelling assignment • Give ample opportunity for student-generated classroom resources (can be print or digital) • Screencastify can allow students to record themselves narrating the stories they made on digital storytelling platforms.

Sample Scope and Sequence		
Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1	Goal setting and Beelinguapp exploration	Mini lesson on claims and evidence (structure, vocabulary, etc) Using their goals, students choose a short mystery story from archive.org to find examples of: 1. 1-2 grammar points from their personal goals for the unit 2. How the solution from the mystery (claim) is supported by evidence Students create language anchor chart with examples form text on shared wall
2	Using their goals, students choose a short mystery story from archive.org to find examples of: 1. 1-2 grammar points from their personal goals for the unit 2. How the solution from the mystery (claim) is supported by evidence Students create language anchor chart with examples form text on shared wall	Using their goals, students choose a short mystery story from archive.org to find examples of: 1. 1-2 grammar points from their personal goals for the unit 2. How the solution from the mystery (claim) is supported by evidence Students create language anchor chart with examples form text on shared wall Alternatively, students can spend this day presenting their anchor charts, or a few students can present throughout the reading days.
3	Watch a murder mystery movie using a "stop and jot" style watching to discuss as a class the evidence available and try to solve the murder as the movie progresses.	Whodunit: A Murder Mystery
4	In-class time to work in groups on digital storytelling project	In-class time to work in groups on digital storytelling project
5	In-class time to work in groups on digital storytelling project	Present digital stories to class

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Sample Lesson 1: Goal Setting and Beelinguapp		
Objective: By the end of class students will set learning goals for the unit.		
Time (75 min)	Activity	Notes
10 min	Introduction: • Introduce structure of the unit and learning goals	Discuss the mystery theme and the general learning goals and assignments
30 min	Goal setting: • Introduce goal setting activity • Give example goals students can set using the "I can" structure • Students should have at least three goals (can use different action verbs like "use" "recognize" etc. can provide list of verbs from Bloom's taxonomy)	While students should set individual goals, encourage them to work together to brainstorm goals. Teacher should also walk around and assist students.
20 min	Beelinguapp: • Students should download and register for Beelinguapp on their mobile devices • Students should set a weekly reading goal through the prompts on the app • Students should then add this goal to their existing goal sheet • Show students how to search by genre for mystery stories • Students should complete "Missing Boy: Part 1"	If students have a hard time registering for the app, they can work with a partner. They should NOT be penalized for not having access to the necessary technology.
5 min	Closing: • Students should find a partner and share their goals with eachother	

Sample Lesson 2: Whodunit: A Murder Mystery Game		
Objective: By the end of class students will have collaboratively solved a problem and presenting their findings with clear supporting evidence.		
Time (75 min)	Activity	Notes
12 min	Introduction: • Open the activity by showing 2-3 of the example whodunit YouTube videos • Discuss the characteristics of the whodunit genre	Short explanation of genre is provided next to YouTube playlist
8 min	Explain instructions to students: • Students work in pairs • Use interactive crime scene image to discover clues • Take notes on the clues in the Google Form • Use the evidence collected to determine who the murder is • Make a claim and support it with evidence in the Google Form and in a Flip video • When students come across an unfamiliar term, they should look it up and add it to the Padlet glossary	This was designed assuming students were working in pairs, but groups can be slightly larger or smaller depending on the size of the class Teacher can decide whether to share that there is no one clear correct solution to the mystery
45 min	Students play through the murder mystery game.	Teacher should walk around classroom and provide support where needed Encourage students to use the Padlet to crowdsource language supports
10 min	Closing: • Look over Padlet glossary and discuss the unfamiliar terms • Students share who they think the murderer is	Can also ask for feedback on the game When students are sharing their solution, listen for how well they support their claim and highlight when students do it well

Sample Lesson 3: Claims, Evidence, and Short Stories		
Objective: By the end of class students will be able to identify a claim and give supporting evidence.		
Time (75 min)	Activity	Notes
18 min	Minilesson: • Ask students what they know about supporting a claim with evidence • Work through an example paragraph as a class, pointing out the claim and identifying relevant supporting details • Use the language in the example paragraph to identify language that supports arguments • Collectively create a list of words and phrases for making a claim and supporting an argument	Can make an anchor chart, write on a digital wall, or on some other shared digital workspace Examples: so, therefore, because, I know this because, clearly, etc. Continue to build on this anchor chart as students identify new language through the short mystery stories they read.
8 min	Introduce archive.org resource • Provide students with this link • Allow students some time to explore the stories available and choose one to read through with a partner (up to groups of three depending on class size)	The teacher can scaffold the story choice here or allow students freer reign, depending on class needs. Hercule Poirot Early Cases (stories) pdf has short, manageable stories if you want to narrow the choices to just the stories in that book. Note: it is possible to structure the short story lessons as having students choose new stories each class, or students can choose some of the longer stories and spend all three days working on the one story (would work best for classes that meet more frequently)
35 min	Using the story they selected: • Each student in the pair or group should choose one grammar feature from their goal sheet to look for in the story • As they read, students should write down examples they find of their grammar feature • Once they finish reading they should find the CLAIM (solution to the	This

	mystery) and the EVIDENCE used to support the claim	
8 min	Students create anchor chart for their language feature using examples they found from the text and post it on the shared digital wall	
6 min	Discuss the claim and evidence students found in their stories. If they found new relevant vocabulary, add it to claim and evidence anchor chart.	

Assignment 1: Goal Setting					
Directions: For this unit you will be setting THREE learning goals and tracking evidence of your goals as you go. Use the criteria below and the example given in the goal setting sheet to guide you as you set goals. For these goals you will need to: - Choose at least three grammar features you would like to focus on in this unit (imperative verbs, past tense, noun-verb agreement, contractions, etc). If you are unsure what you want to focus on, you can use *An Introduction to English Grammar,* feedback from past assignments, or personal interest to guide your choice. - Consult the Bloom's Taxonomy verb chart to help you form your goals. - Goals should follow the format "I can _____" - Create new goals at the end of the unit that build on your current goals - Reflect on the process of setting and working towards language goals					
Rubric:					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Feedback
I set three achievable, specific, and relevant goals.					
My goals use action verbs from Bloom's Taxonomy example chart					
I collected evidence for each goal. (minimum one, 2-4 is preferred)					
I created new goals that build on my current knowledge					
I reflect on what I have learned through my goals. (From the process of goal setting, about grammar features, about tracking your own progress, etc.)					

Assignment 2: Whodunit Game Solution Flip		
Directions: For the Solution Flip Video, you should answer the following: -Who you believe murdered Sir Barnabas Brimsey-Chudwell -What clues you found to support your claim -How you eliminated the other suspects -How confident you are in your answer		

Rubric:		
Strengths in your work	Criteria	Where you work can be stronger
	I speak in complete sentences	
	I use relevant vocabulary to support my CLAIM with EVIDENCE	
	My speech is clear: I do not mumble or whisper	
	My speech is clear: I successfully communicate my ideas in English	
	I answer each of the prompts in the directions	

Assignment 3: Digital Storytelling

Directions: For the final project in this unit, you will work in groups of 3 to create a digital mystery story.
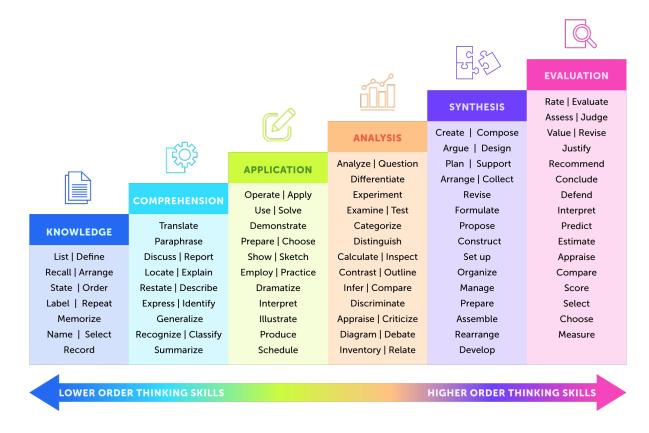- Write a mystery story of 500-2000 words
- The mystery should have at least 3 clues
- The clues should lead to a clear, stated solution
- The digital story should include writing and audiobook-style narration.
- You will present your digital story to the class on the final day of the unit.
- Each member of the group should include *at least* one grammar feature from their goals in the story
- The English in the story should be clear and understandable

(NB: See suggested resources box for examples of platforms for digital storytelling. The teacher should decide on 1-3 options students can choose from to create and share their digital stories)

Rubric:

Student Notes	Criteria	Teacher Notes
	I include audio elements in my digital story	
	I include written elements in my digital story	
	My story has a clear beginning, middle and end	
	My story is a mystery that includes at least three clues	
	My story is a mystery that has a well-supported solution	
	My story successfully communicates its ideas in English	
	My story is sufficiently long (500-2000 words)	
	My story successfully includes grammar features from group member 1's goals	
	My story successfully includes grammar features from group member 2's goals	

	My story successfully includes grammar features from group member 3's goals	
	I use good public speaking skills when presenting my digital story	

Goal Setting		
Goal	Evidence	New Goal
Ex: I can use the imperative form of verbs.	I found examples of imperative in "The Christmas Caper." I made an anchor chart explaining how to use the imperative. I use the imperative in my digital story.	I can use the imperative form when speaking.
Reflections:		

KNOWLEDGE	COMPREHENSION	APPLICATION	ANALYSIS	SYNTHESIS	EVALUATION
List | Define	Translate	Operate | Apply	Analyze | Question	Create | Compose	Rate | Evaluate
Recall | Arrange	Paraphrase	Use | Solve	Differentiate	Argue | Design	Assess | Judge
State | Order	Discuss | Report	Demonstrate	Experiment	Plan | Support	Value | Revise
Label | Repeat	Locate | Explain	Prepare | Choose	Examine | Test	Arrange | Collect	Justify
Memorize	Restate | Describe	Show | Sketch	Categorize	Revise	Recommend
Name | Select	Express | Identify	Employ | Practice	Distinguish	Formulate	Conclude
Record	Generalize	Dramatize	Calculate | Inspect	Propose	Defend
	Recognize | Classify	Interpret	Contrast | Outline	Construct	Interpret
	Summarize	Illustrate	Infer | Compare	Set up	Predict
		Produce	Discriminate	Organize	Estimate
		Schedule	Appraise | Criticize	Manage	Appraise
			Diagram | Debate	Prepare	Compare
			Inventory | Relate	Assemble	Score
				Rearrange	Select
				Develop	Choose
					Measure

LOWER ORDER THINKING SKILLS   HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS

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