

GRADE 8 ELA AND SOCIAL STUDIES: Elements of Crime

Summary of Learning Opportunity

I teach an integrated Humanities class, which fulfills both the Language Arts and Social Studies curriculums. Our unit's inquiry question was "Was the Criminal Justice System of the Middle Ages fair?" In this unit, students explored elements of short stories and the Medieval justice system. During the unit, we read and discussed themes from several short stories ("Lamb to the Slaughter," "The Granddaughter" and "The Tell-Tale Heart"). Students identified the crimes committed in the stories and discussed the justice process and punishment through the lens of Medieval Europe.

English Language Arts Grade 8	Learning Standards	- Synthesize ideas from a variety of sources to build understanding - Think critically, creatively and reflectively to explore ideas within, between and beyond texts
Social Studies Grade 8		- Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past (ethical judgment) - Social systems and structures

Literacy Connections	Instruction and Assessment	Competencies Developed, Practiced and/or Assessed
LITERACY: Applies Understanding—Synthesizes ideas and information	The instruction of this unit happened in two themes:	
	Theme 1: Breaking Laws and Analyzing Motives Students examine how identity and societal expectations influence individuals' decisions to break laws, linking back to characters in the short stories.	
	Class Discussion/Group Work: - Discussion: Why did the characters break the laws? What influenced their decisions? How did identity (personal, societal or cultural) influence the characters' moral decisions? - In small groups, students listed factors that motivated the characters to commit crimes including societal pressures, emotional triggers and personal identity. They compared these to potential influences in historical settings. - Discussion: How might similar actions have been judged in the Middle Ages? Formative assessment: Students wrote a short response analyzing the motives of characters in the stories and compared this with how individuals were judged for their actions in historical contexts, including medieval justice systems.	Synthesize ideas from a variety of sources to build understanding Think critically, creatively and reflectively to explore ideas within, between and beyond texts

Theme 2: Law and Punishment: From Literature to History

Students compare the consequences of breaking laws in literature with punishments in historical contexts, focusing on how justice systems have evolved from ancient Rome to medieval Europe. This serves as an introduction to the concepts of justice in historical times.

Class Discussion/Group Work:

- Recap the consequences faced by characters in the short stories
- Discussion: What kind of punishment did the characters deserve? How might they have been punished in medieval Europe?

Lesson: Introduction to Historical Context:

- Briefly introduce the transition from the fall of Rome to the rise of medieval Europe, focusing on how laws and justice evolved.
- Provide examples of medieval justice (e.g., trial by ordeal, trial by combat or feudal law).
- In small groups, students research and present on different methods of punishment from the Middle Ages.
- Discuss how these methods compare to modern justice systems and to the stories they've read. What do these differences reveal about changing ideas of justice?

LITERACY:
Communicates
ideas and
information—
Justifies and
defends decisions
and/or ideas

Unit assessment: Writing task

Prompt: "Imagine one of the characters from the short stories read this unit lived during the Middle Ages. Write a short response (2-3 paragraphs) describing how their crime would have been judged and punished during that time. Consider the justice systems discussed in class."

Make ethical judgments
about past events, decisions
or actions, and assess the
limitations of drawing direct
lessons from the past
(ethical judgment)

Demonstrations of Student Learning, Teacher Assessment, and Reflection

Teacher's Observations and Assessment**Student A (next page): Proficient**

Student A's response is well organized. They make an ethical judgement about the crime and punishment and justify their analysis using evidence from the story by clearly presenting the main parts of the story and identifying the crime and potential motivation for the protagonist's actions. They were able to apply strategies such as summarizing to synthesize key messages and ideas in the text and from class discussions. They were able to draw connections between the crime and the potential consequences during the Middle Ages and present-day Canada. They considered gender, socio-economic status and the nature of the crime to determine the most realistic response to the crime. This in-depth synthesis demonstrates critical thinking to explore ideas within, between and beyond texts.

Student A

"Lambs To The Slaughter" by Roald Dahl, is a short yet interesting story about murder and deception. Mary Maloney, who is the killer, murders her husband, Patrick, with a frozen leg of lamb. After, he tells her something that she may have not liked. She then goes to the grocery store to make an alibi for herself so that she can commence her plan. She goes home after and acts surprised to find her husband dead then calls the police. She makes the police eat the murder weapon which she used, the meat from a big leg of lamb. The story ends with the wife laughing as she has just successfully deceived the police. In this response, I will explore the implications of her crime, the medieval punishment that she would have likely received, and how it compares to the present. If Mary Maloney had lived in the Middle Ages, her punishment for murder would have been significantly and arguably less fair than the justice system in Canada today.

The murder that Mary Maloney did to her husband was both planned and surprising at the same time. After Patrick announces something to her, she becomes enraged. Thus, leading her to strike Patrick with the leg of lamb. Maybe she felt a sense of betrayal and really overwhelming emotions from whatever he said to her. It was overbearing for her and this caused her to murder him. In the Middle Ages, this crime could have been seen as a crime of passion since she killed her husband because of something he said. Crimes of passion usually have less leniency meaning she would have probably gotten an even harsher punishment than the one she was supposed to get.

In the Middle Ages, the legal system was known for having pretty severe punishments as a deterrent to prevent crimes. Murder, specifically of a husband by the wife, would have been treated extremely seriously and would have been dealt with in the royal court. Women who committed murders were seen as being possessed by an evil spirit or having some sort of mental issue. So for their punishment, they would have been strangled and burnt. Not only is this a likely scenario for her punishment but it could also be even more severe given it was her husband. Maybe she would have been executed given the severity of this crime and also because they liked to prioritize justice for individual circumstances.

Considering the context of justice in the Middle Ages, I believe that the punishment that Mary Maloney would have received would have been too excessively harsh because they don't consider her motives or her psychological state. In the Middle Ages, they didn't really care about the complexity of human emotions and the circumstances surrounding the situation. In Canada's justice system, it emphasizes rehabilitation for the person and it also wants to see the context of the crime as a way to determine the person who did it. I think that a more just punishment would have to have some kind of mental health checkup and to have her spend some time focusing on rehabilitation rather than retribution. Canada's justice system really shows how far we have come in realizing that compassion and being able to understand someone is more important than serving the punishment.

All in all, If Mary Maloney had lived in the Middle Ages, her punishment would have been severe and unforgiven because of the murder against her husband which is a reflection of the not so developed justice system they had back in the day. With Canada's justice system now, we can see just how much the justice system has evolved, emphasizing rehabilitation over just punishment. We see that today, our justice system aims to balance the accountability of someone's actions with compassion, making sure that the person gets to be judged not biased by their actions. I hope that as society keeps on evolving, that our justice system also evolves to be even more fair to others.

Teacher's Observations and Assessment

Student B: Proficient

Student B summarized the short story in an engaging way, identifying the crime and motivation from the story. They commented on the over-simplification of the crime in the story compared with real-life crimes, demonstrating critical thinking. In the student's response, they described the structure of medieval justice and hypothesized how the protagonist would have been judged given the circumstances of the crime and their social status, using evidence from our class discussions to justify their hypothesis. The writing is well-organized, and they present a logical ethical judgement, synthesizing their learning from the unit.

Teacher's Reflection

The Learning Pathways provided a very specific lens for the final unit assessment. The goal of the unit was for students to make ethical judgements about past events. I was able to use the Literacy Proficiency Descriptors to help me break down how students must synthesize information from multiple sources in order to be able to make an ethical judgement. Students also needed to justify their reasoning for the judgement. I appreciated seeing the students use critical thinking and creative thinking skills to organize and support their thoughts and responses.

Student B (excerpt)

long, child, I don't have that kind of patience." *Buuuurrrp* "Ah very tasty indeed. But hey, at least you can keep your granny company." This story shows an innocent child and granny getting brutally eaten by a savage wolf. In modern society, this crime would be punished with a life sentence of 25 years but in the middle ages, they treated these crimes differently. The medieval ages treated this crime with more serious and threatening consequences. Though their consequences are brutal it is appropriate as his crime was serious and their status was poor.

In the story, the wolf murdered two innocent people which is a violation of their rights which means it is a crime. We can identify from the story that the wolf was just hungry and wanted something to eat and thought two humans sounded like a great meal. This doesn't justify his action even though we say it is the cycle of life, animals eat other animals. To counter this, fairy tales usually make it look like the villain is just a bad person and wants to harm these characters for the sake of it.

Murder is never something to take lightly especially in the medieval ages. In the medieval times, his punishment would most likely have resulted in death or extreme torture. The medieval ages had three types of courts that you went to depending on the crime you committed. The manor court was for smaller crimes like small thefts, fighting, drunkenness, and farming issues. And finally Church court was for church crimes such as blasphemy and heresy. Murder is one of the most serious crimes you can commit so he could go to Royal Court, but in those days, a talking wolf would have been considered witchcraft so he would have gone to Church Court. There is a very high chance that the wolf would have been burned while there because they believed you had to burn witches in those days. If he wasn't taken to the church court and went to Royal court, he would have gone through an ordeal by water as in the 16 and 17th century they did this to witches. In this ordeal he would be thrown into a river and if he sank to the bottom he was innocent and if he floated he was guilty. If you sank you had to grab a rope and wish they pulled you up before you drowned.

Though this crime's punishment was brutal there wasn't much choice back then. In those days, prisons wouldn't be a great option as it required food, clothing, medical, guards, and space that was limited. Therefore, this punishment reflects this era even though it is a little unnecessary. In today's society, we have more appropriate consequences for this crime such as a life sentence of 25 years. This way the criminal has time to reflect on his action and see how unnecessary their crime was. Also, prison is a "Hell Hole", mentally and physically breaking people as they can't see their loved ones and people are savage and rough. Consequently, these punishments are necessary due to their economy and resources and nowadays we have more reasonable retributions.

In Essence, their social status depicts what a logical consequence this is reflecting his crime and how critical it was. Using prisons would have been inefficient and if used could have determined the end of the civilization as it was a waste of the already restricted resources. From this we can depict how stable and rational they were back then.