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UNPACKING A STANDARD:
WITH MYSTERIES
BY JULIE GREEN

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Mysteries are adventure and challenge wrapped up together. The best mysteries for youth draw young readers in right away with exhilarating intrigue. They present a problem fairly quickly in the text, and then give readers a chance to solve it all on their own as they follow the clues dangled tantalizingly throughout the story. Mysteries also provide opportunities for students to read closely, pay careful attention to story details, and to make inferences—all activities that are emphasized in the Common Core State Standards! Below are suggestions for implementing CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1–6.1 with notable youth mysteries.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

The Great Cake Mystery: Precious Ramotswe's Very First Case. By Alexander McCall Smith. Illus. by Iain McIntosh. 2012. 80p. Anchor, \$12.99 (9780307949448). Gr. 2–4.

Smith's youth prequel to his best-selling adult series, the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, is about honest, good-hearted Precious, whose friend is accused of stealing sweets from his classmates. Throughout the story, the narrator writes little bits of advice or comments about life truths that relate to what the characters are going through. As students read through the story, create a class book of the narrator's "life advice" and then list which of Precious' actions exemplify that advice. Next, have students discuss events in their own lives that would illustrate that same advice.

Mr. and Mrs. Bunny—Detectives Extraordinaire. By Polly Horvath. Illus. by Sophie Blackall. 2012. 256p. Random/Schwartz & Wade, \$16.99 (9780375867552). Gr. 3–6.

In an interview on the blog *Random Acts of Kindness*, Mrs. Bunny, the "author" of this whimsical book, states that her husband, Mr. Bunny, does not always like how he is portrayed in the story. Have students choose a chapter from the novel to read closely. Next, have students pick out phrases and

sentences to which they feel Mr. Bunny would object and then explain why, based on what they already know about Mr. Bunny. Finally, direct students to rewrite a paragraph or chapter of the book in Mr. Bunny's voice.

The Case of the Ruby Slippers. By Martha Freeman. 2012. 124p. Holiday, \$16.95 (9780823424092). Gr. 2–4.

The First Kids Mystery series focuses on two presidential daughters and their cousin who solve mysteries while living at the White House. The story includes details about rooms in the White House, and there is also an appendix featuring information about actual historical events that relate to the novel. Have students note White House rooms or historical artifacts mentioned throughout the book. Using the historical back matter as a guide, have students research other historical moments that took place in those rooms, or even other actual mysteries that might have taken place there. Students can use this information to begin to write their own installment in the series.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

The Sixty-Eight Rooms. By Marianne Malone. Illus. by Gina Triplet. 2010. 288p. Random, \$16.99 (9780375857102). Gr. 4–6.

This inventive mystery begins as a magical adventure. As students read the story, have them map out unanswered questions using chart paper to organize and list ideas. With arrows, show which questions lead to new questions and which ones eventually get answered. Discuss with students, both during the exercise and afterward, how the story's central mystery evolves throughout the book, using the chart as a reference.

Remarkable. By Lizzie K. Foley. 2012. 304p. Dial, \$16.99 (9780803737068). Gr. 3–7.

This mystery is one filled with colorful characters who all have some skill or quality that makes them remarkable, and quite a few of them are really not who they seem. Students can choose one character, who they will follow throughout the story. Have students record the character's actions as well as his or her dialogue and inner commentary, and then have students make predictions about what the character is hiding, referring directly back to the characters' comments or actions and fully explaining the reasons behind their predictions.

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The Puzzler's Mansion. By Eric Berlin. 2012. 288p. Putnam, \$16.99 (9780399256974). Gr. 4–7.

Focused on a 12-year-old who loves brain teasers, this third book in the series *The Puzzling World of Winston Breen* offers more opportunities for readers to tackle word, number, and logic puzzles as they help solve a mystery. Have students create a “deleted” scene: a scene that is not directly written about in the story but would logically have happened to carry the story from one event to the next. Using direct evidence of what the characters actually do and say in the text as guidance, students will construct realistic dialogue that could have fit into the plot of the story. Finally, have students act out their invented scene.

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