

# MYSTERY LESSON

## **Application 4: Mystery Lesson**

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This assignment was extremely difficult for me to put together because it simply doesn't work with any of my Digital Media or Spoken English curriculum. In my Digital Media classes, the learning is so condensed and practical that using a Mystery Lesson would simply confuse and complicate the learning process for most of my students. In my Spoken English classes, I must concentrate on learners with very basic comprehension abilities, so presenting material that focuses on higher-level thinking so much would be instantly unsuccessful.

Instead, I have chosen to create a unit that might be interesting for my Digital Media students (even though it would probably never be taught in that curriculum). For this lesson, the mystery revolves around online identity and personal information.

The problem and explanation for this lesson is this:

A middle school girl has been receiving strange messages from an anonymous source on the Internet. She has received emails (with attached photos), text messages, links to websites, and messages on her online journal. She suspects that it might be someone she knows, but she will have to follow the clues to find the source of the information, the reason for the communication, and the most ideal ways of dealing with the situation.

The students will be separated into groups of 3-4 people to work together on this project. Each group member will be given a digital clue that will be distributed on his individual computer workstation. The groups will then analyze their clues together to come up with their hypotheses and conclusions. As they move through the process, each group will record this information onto a digital worksheet that will be turned in at the end of the project. Finally, the groups will all participate in a classroom discussion, where they will present their hypotheses and conclusions and receive feedback from their peers.

The clues will be in the following formats:

- An email, with complete headers, that details the IP address, time of transmission, and servers that were used to transmit the message.
- A MySpace comment from an "anonymous" user. This MySpace account will be created ahead of time by the teacher and designed to subtly release clues about the user's identity.
- A photo that was sent as an email attachment to the girl. There will be clues to the identity and location of the sender in the background of the photo.
- A personal blog that contains clues about the user's identity in the URL, About Me section, and blog posts.
- A set of links to important web resources, including information about email headers and IP addresses, the MySpace and blogging software's Privacy Policies, and an IP Locator.

- A list of friends and acquaintances of the girl, including clues about their current relationships, communications, and experiences together.

As the students piece these clues together, they will not only be able to solve the mystery of the strange messages, but they will also learn a lot about online identity and anonymity. Most people who use the Internet have a very limited knowledge of these topics, and many people who use online resources irresponsibly do not understand how open and accessible their personal information is online. This project should help my students to become more illuminated and aware of the intricacies of online identity.

Overall, I think that the Mystery Lesson is a great way to introduce this type of project. It would easily elicit excitement and involvement from all of my students, and I believe that they would also take ownership of the solutions and implement them in their personal lives. As Silver states, “presenting content to be studied as a mystery immediately suggest to students that they have an active role to play in the lesson” (2003). Unfortunately, my curriculum probably doesn't allow for this type of project at this moment, but I will be considering the possibility of adapting other units to use the Mystery Lesson format in the future.

**Reference:**

Silver, H.F., Hanson, J.R., Strong R.W., & Schwartz, P.B. (2003). *Teaching Styles and Strategies*. Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ: The Thoughtful Education Press.