



COMPREHENSION CLIFFHANGERS

Mysteries

15 Suspenseful Stories That Guide Students to Infer, Visualize,
& Summarize to Predict the Ending of Each Story

BILL DOYLE

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Teaching
Resources

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Introduction

IT'S NO MYSTERY WHY MYSTERIES CAN MAKE SUCH POWERFUL LEARNING TOOLS. All about discovery and excitement, good mysteries are inherently high-interest tales. They entice readers to keep turning pages until the detective cracks the case and the crook is revealed.

With the fun, action-packed whodunits in this book, we've capitalized on readers' eagerness to solve the case by asking them to stop and reflect just before the climax. The comprehension questions at these points provide learning opportunities that are charged with excitement!

Depending on your students' reading level, you may want to read aloud the first story to illustrate how the stopping points can help enhance their reading experience.

You'll also find a supplemental teacher page accompanying each mystery. The page is broken down into three main sections.

Vocabulary

You may want to review these words and definitions with students before they read the stories.

Before Reading

In this section, you'll find ideas for building background knowledge and how to focus on different reading strategies, such as:

- * Making connections
- * Understanding genre
- * Summarizing
- * Making predictions
- * Visualizing
- * Reading for details
- * Understanding literary elements
- * Making inferences

After Reading

Discussion ideas and writing prompts offer ways to reinforce skills and foster an enhanced appreciation for reading.

According to *Bringing Words to Life* (Guilford, 2002):

“**Students become interested and enthusiastic about words when instruction is rich and lively.**”

What is more rich and lively than a good mystery?

Creature Features

And Then There Was One ...

Before Reading**Background Building**

In this mystery, 12-year-old Annie, Pawtown's most famous animal detective, is on the case. This time she must use her sleuthing talent to uncover who is "dog-napping" valuable puppies from the Furry Critters Pet Shop.

To help set the scene, ask students to talk about what kind of animals they would expect to find in a pet shop and let them describe the inside of such a store.

Focus of Reading Strategy: Reading for Details

Picking up details in stories is a valuable skill—especially when reading mysteries. Authors of detective tales will often hide clues in the details, and it can take a careful reader to spot them all.

Point out to students that they should think like detectives when reading this story, keeping an eye out for important details—just as a sleuth looks for clues.

After Reading**Talk About It**

Ask students to say the characters' names out loud and to think about them. Elicit that a few of the names help describe the characters, such as Ms. Sellunow (who sells pets in the shop) and Mr. Kees (who works with *keys* as a locksmith).

Discuss why an author might use such a naming technique. Possible conclusions include: these names are more memorable to the reader; they help set a more comical tone.

Write About It

Ask students to pretend that they are Annie, and have them write a short letter to a friend describing this case.



Vocabulary



Here's a list of words your students will come across in this mystery—as well as their definitions:

burly	heavily built
cowered	curled up, showing fear
crocodile tears	fake tears
desperate	in need
detective	a person who works to solve mysteries
forlorn	pitiful, sad
limousine	a large, luxury car
locksmith	a person who makes or fixes locks
sarcastically	not seriously
stammered	had difficulty speaking
suspects	wrongdoers

And Then There Was One ...

Someone is puppy-napping cute critters,
and it's up to Annie to crack the case.



“Nooooo!”

The scream jerked Annie awake. The 12-year-old sat up, banging her head on a puppy cage and sending fur and bits of paper flying.

What the kibble is going on? she wondered, glancing at her watch. It was only 6 A.M. Pawtown’s one and only animal detective had been having a nice, peaceful dream about flowing water—and it took her a second to figure out where she was.

On the shelves around her there were cages filled with animals—five red parrots in one, four mutt puppies in another, countless hamsters, ferrets, kittens—even an emu.

Now she remembered. Of course! She was in the Furry Critters Pet Shop.

Two days ago, a crook had stolen a valuable bluecoat puppy from the store. Annie had spent last night here, planning to look for clues. But she must have fallen asleep.

“Nooooo!” There was that scream again. With a sinking feeling, Annie jumped to her feet and rushed toward the sound. Two aisles over, she found Ms. Sellunow, the plump woman who ran the pet shop. She was standing next to a large cage, and her face was wet with tears.

“Are you okay?” Annie asked. Before Ms. Sellunow could answer, a tall, thin

figure sprinted through the front door. It was Tater, a man who did odd jobs around the shop.

"I was on my way to work and could hear you screaming down the street!" Tater cried, hurrying over to them. "What's happened?"

Ms. Sellunow blew her nose into a blue handkerchief. "I just got here," she sobbed. "A second puppy has been . . . dog-napped!"

She pointed a finger with a gold ring at the cage, which held the small bluecoat dogs—famous for their blue color. Because they were so rare and valuable, Ms. Sellunow had the only key to the cage and only she fed and cared for them.

Annie peered into the cage where the mother dog paced nervously and just one little blue puppy cowered in the corner.

"Another bluecoat is missing?" Tater asked, leaning against the big sink where the animals were bathed. "Those puppies are too young to be without their mom. They could be in danger."

This made Ms. Sellunow sob even louder. She turned to Annie. "When I hired you yesterday to find my stolen puppy, there were still two. Now one more is gone! I thought you were supposed to be a great animal detective."

Annie said miserably, "I am." Or at least she wanted to be. Right now she felt like a failure. How could she have fallen asleep on the job?

Just then, a burly man wearing a fancy black suit burst into the store and stormed over to them. Annie recognized Mr. Kees right away. He owned three stores in town that sold keys and locks.

"I must have a blue puppy today, Ms. Sellunow!" he demanded. "The mayor is coming over to my house, and I need to have the best dog. I'll pay any price."

Ms. Sellunow stepped between him and the bluecoats' cage. "I've told you again and again, Mr. Kees, I've already sold these puppies to Mrs. Gotrocks. When they're old enough to leave their mother, she'll get them. And no one else."

Turning so red that he looked like a balloon about to pop, Mr. Kees shouted, "I'll get one of those blue dogs. Just you wait!" He left the shop, slamming the door and speeding away in his limousine.

Ms. Sellunow was still crying. "I don't care about money," she moaned. "I'd never sell my puppies to a person like Mr. Kees."

Not sure what to do now, Annie ran a hand through her hair—and her fingers touched something. She plucked free a piece of paper about half the size of an index card. "What's this?" she wondered out loud.

Ms. Sellunow sniffled. "A clue it's time to wash your hair?" She didn't wait for an answer. "I'm going in the back to weep for my lost bluecoats." With her silver bracelets jangling, Ms. Sellunow wandered off to the back of the shop.

Annie looked down at the paper in her hand. It had yesterday's date and read:

Three Mutt Puppies for Sale! Get Them CHEAP! She never understood why mutts were sold for so much less than purebred dogs like the bluecoats. Mutts were just as good as pets.

The little sign must have fallen into her hair when she banged her head against the mutts' cage. Annie's instincts told her it might be an important clue, but she couldn't figure out how it would help crack the case.

If only Annie could think. But a loud crunching sound kept distracting her. Tater was standing next to her, eating dog biscuits that were shaped like little bones.

"I brought a sandwich with me last night," Annie said, feeling sorry for him. "Do you want half?"

"No, thanks," Tater said through a mouthful of biscuits. "I like this stuff."

Annie didn't think that was possible. She had once been trapped in the wilderness for two weeks, and she wasn't sure she'd have eaten dog treats even then.

"Maybe you should make sure Ms. Sellunow is okay," Annie suggested. Tater nodded and slinked off, still munching away.

Alone now, Annie thought about the case and the main suspects. Who could be stealing the bluecoat puppies? Ms. Sellunow had the only key to the cage, but Mr. Kees was a locksmith. Did he pick the lock on the cage and steal the puppies? And then there was Tater. Was he eating dog treats because he was desperate for money—desperate enough to nab the puppies and sell them to Mr. Kees?

Annie turned her attention back to the cage. The bluecoat mother was pacing in there, looking forlorn. If only she could tell Annie what had happened to her puppies.

Maybe she can, Annie thought, spotting something in the dog's mouth. Annie smooshed her face up against the cage to get a better look. It was a piece of blue cloth.

That's when all the clues came together. The sound of flowing water in her dream, the piece of cloth, the sign about the mutts . . . everything clicked into place!

Annie let out a howl of excitement, thinking she might have solved the case. To make sure, though, she would wait until tonight to spring her trap.

Ten hours later, the shop was closed for business. The lights were off, and most of the animals were asleep in the darkness. Annie was lying on the floor, pretending to snore.

She could hear the sound of the front door opening and closing. The dog-napper was in the shop. Footsteps headed slowly toward the cage holding the last bluecoat puppy.

In the blink of an eye, Annie sat up and clicked on her flashlight, trapping the crook in the beam of light. "Hello," Annie said. "I've been expecting you."

**Stop
Here!****Discussion Questions**

1. How many puppies have been dog-napped? What makes them so special?
2. Can you name the three main suspects? What reason might each one have to take the puppies?
3. Which character do you think Annie is speaking to when she says, "I've been expecting you"? Who do you think the crook is?
4. Talk about possible ways this story could end. Can you predict what will happen?

OKAY! Now keep reading to see if you were right.

Getting to her feet, Annie kept the flashlight pointed at the shopkeeper. "Good evening, Ms. Sellunow."

Looking surprised, Ms. Sellunow froze next to the bluecoats' cage. She stammered, "I just came here..."

"To steal another animal?" Annie finished for her.

"You think I'm the bad guy?" Ms. Sellunow started sobbing—again. "Why would I steal my own bluecoat puppies?"

"Because you never had them," Annie said, not buying the woman's crocodile tears.

The plump woman pretended to be shocked. "You saw them with your own eyes! Look, there's one now!" Ms. Sellunow pointed at the blue fur ball in the cage.

Annie shook her head. "That isn't a bluecoat. It's a mutt. You used blue dye to make the mutts look like bluecoats. Then you sold the fake puppies to make some quick money."

"Money?" Ms. Sellunow cried. "I don't care about money!"

"You say that, but you're covered in gold and silver jewelry," Annie said, gesturing to the woman's rings and bracelets. Ms. Sellunow didn't bother arguing.

"You knew that if the puppies went home with Mrs. Gotrocks, she would

learn the truth,” Annie continued. “But you wouldn’t have to give the money back if the puppies were stolen first. So you hired me to make your dog-napping story more believable.”

“But you know the real story, do you?” the woman said, rubbing her eyes.

“That’s right,” Annie said. “The past two nights you came in here and took one of the phony puppies out of the bluecoats’ cage and washed off the blue dye.” Annie flashed her light on the sink used to bathe the animals and then back on Ms. Sellunow. “That’s why I dreamt about running water—I heard the sound from the faucet even though I was asleep.”

“I think you’re still dreaming, dear,” Ms. Sellunow said sarcastically. “I don’t have to listen to this.”

Before she could walk away, Annie stopped her. “There’s more. At some point, the bluecoat female bit off a piece of the handkerchief you used to dry the mutt. I found the cloth in her mouth, and I’d bet it would perfectly match your handkerchief.”

Mrs. Sellunow threw up her hands in disbelief. “And where did I stash this squeaky-clean mutt?”

“In with the other mutts, of course,” Annie answered. “This morning I noticed there were four mutts in that cage. But according to this sign, there should only be three.” Annie held up the paper that read: *Three Mutt Puppies for Sale! Get Them CHEAP!* “The extra mutt is the one you washed off and put in with the others last night.”

Suddenly, all the fake sadness drained out of Ms. Sellunow’s face. She looked like an angry, cornered animal ready to pounce. “So what if you’re right?” she hissed. “No one is going to believe *you*.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that,” Annie said.

That was when Tater stepped out of the shadows where Annie had asked him to watch and listen. “I believe Annie,” he told Ms. Sellunow. “We’re going to call the police, and you’re going to give back Mrs. Gotrocks’ money.”

Ms. Sellunow seemed to realize she was caught. “Oh, no,” she whined, and slumped against the wall. She started sobbing, and for the first time Annie thought there were real tears.

“Are you going to lose your job?” Annie asked Tater, worried about his future.

Tater smiled. “Actually, this is my store. Ms. Sellunow just worked here. And, guess what, Ms. Sellunow?” he asked, popping a dog biscuit into his mouth. “You’re fired.”