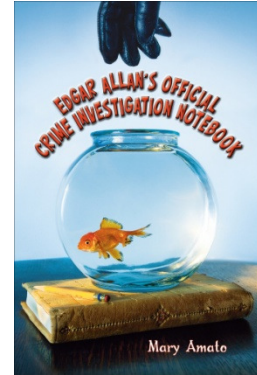


Edgar Allan's Official Crime Investigation Notebook

Interdisciplinary Exploration Unit



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Language Arts

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions.

1. Edgar spies on his classmates in an effort to solve the mystery, and in the process he learns something important about each one. Specifically, he reads: Destiny's poem about the willow tree; Taz's article about osteosarcoma; and Patrick's poems about his parents' divorce. Do you think Edgar should have read these items? What did he learn about his classmates?
2. On page 59, Edgar wonders if everybody has a secret sadness. What do you think?
3. Why do you think Mr. Crew likes his students to have a moment of silence before they start to write?
4. Describe Edgar's weaknesses and strengths.
5. Authors often deliberately repeat images or details in a book. For example, Edgar says that giving up would be like handing Patrick a big bowl of victory with whipped cream on top (p. 20) Later, after he writes his "Inside" poem, Edgar helps himself to a big bowl of ice cream with whipped cream on top (p.95). Why do you think Mary Amato chose to do this? Dogs are another repeated image throughout the book. Discuss where and how dogs are mentioned or appear in the book. Why do you think Amato chose to have Edgar wish he could have a dog?
6. In the first part of the book, Edgar doesn't like poetry, is embarrassed that his parents are clowns, believes that Destiny and Taz are always happy, and says that he hates Patrick several times. Describe how and why Edgar's feelings about topics change by the end of the book.

Vocabulary List

Define the following words.

Professional (p.3)

Nonchalant (p.20)

Forensics (p.30)

Cosmetics (p.32)

Seizure (p.39)

Tread (p.41)

Damaging (p.45)

Sleuthing (p.46)

Neglecting (p.50)

Verified (p.67)

Spectrum (p.68)

Doorjamb (p.94)

Flourish (p.99)

Alibi (p.116)

Precision (117)

Bonus: Using the context of Mary Amato's book, come up with definitions for the following *neologisms* (made-up words):

Luminiferous (p.33)

Slobberjaws (p.79)

Example of Revising from Edgar Allan's Official Crime Investigation Notebook

All writers have to revise their work. Even after a writer believes he or she is finished with the book, the editor at the publishing company will read the work and make suggestions for improvement. Writers need to have a positive attitude about revising. Read Mary Amato's following notes about the revision process.

Sometimes, editors catch a problem that appears more than once in a book. Mary Cash, my editor for this book, noticed that many of my chapter openings were bland. She suggested that I "jazz up" my chapter openings, and she was right! Here's an example of how I revised one chapter opening.

Original draft:

Chapter Twelve

It was raining when Edgar woke up, raining when he went out to catch the bus, and still raining when the bus pulled into the school parking lot.

First, I looked at my original writing for clues to tell me what kind of day it was and what was happening in this part of the story, and then I imagined that I was Edgar (a boy who wants to use his detective skills to find a thief that has been stealing things from his teacher's classroom) and that I was riding the school bus in the rain. I asked myself: What would I see? What would I hear? What would I be thinking? Here's my revision:

Chapter Twelve

Overnight, dark thunderclouds had invaded the sky, and now the rain was pounding on top of the school bus like it was trying to get in. An ominous morning. As the bus pulled into the school parking lot, Edgar looked out to see if there were any criminal looking types lurking around the school's entrance.

Much better! But I'm not done yet. Before I send a final revision back to my editor, I always read my work aloud. Reading aloud helps a writer to catch repetitions and other things that you don't notice when you read silently. When I read this aloud, I noticed that I used both "looked" and "looking" in the last sentence. To make the sentence have a little more sparkle, I decided to change the first "looked" to "peered." So I revised that sentence to read:

... As the bus pulled into the school parking lot, Edgar peered out to see if any criminal looking types were lurking around the school's entrance.

Now I'm happy!

Try writing the opening line of a brand new mystery book. Then, see if you can revise it to make it more dramatic and interesting.

Videos About the Writing Process

Watch the following videos made by Mary Amato to illustrate the writing and publishing process.

- Video about the Publishing Process shows the steps involved in the publishing process, including editing, proofreading, and more.

<http://www.maryamato.com/video-about-the-publishing-process>

- Writing Edgar Allan's Official Crime Investigation Notebook shows Mary Amato's process for writing, including the revision process.

<http://www.maryamato.com/writing-edgar-allans-official-crime-investigation-notebook>

Poetry Writing Activities

Try these poetry writing activities based on Mr. Crew's lessons.

- **Metaphor Poem**
When Kip doesn't understand how to create a metaphor, Destiny says, "Thinks of candy...then think of something else that's really fun, like a party. Then squash the two things together: Candy is a party in my mouth." (p. 16) Choose a subject for a poem (a noun is easiest), and then try to write a metaphor poem about the subject.
- **Riddle Poem**
Pretend that you are something else and try writing a riddle poem, like Edgar does when he writes his pencil poem (p. 48) and his nose poem (p. 52). It doesn't have to rhyme. You might start with "I am..." but don't reveal exactly who you are so that your classmates can guess when you read it aloud.
- **Rhythmic Poem**
Think of a rhythm in your head (such as *Da Dum Da Dum Da Dum*) and try writing a poem with that rhythm (p. 78).
- **Confessional Poem**
Imagine that you are a thief and you have stolen something. Write a poem, confessing your crime.
- **Parody**
A parody is a literary work in which the style of another author is imitated for comic effect. Choose one of the poems that the thief leaves (p. 3, p. 66, p. 98, and p.199) and find the original, famous poem upon which Mary Amato based her parody. Then, choose a famous poem or song and try writing your own parody.

How To Write a Funny Poem

In Edgar Allan's Official Crime Investigation Notebook, the characters often write funny poems. Here's how I write my poems.

1. Think of a subject that you find funny. For example, a nose.
2. Jot down all the things that pop into your brain when you think about this subject
3. Write a rough draft of your poem.
4. Revise it by asking yourself these questions:
 - A. Is there a rhythm? If so, are there places where the rhythm could be improved by choosing a different way to say it? I changed "Sometimes I'm runny/Sometimes I'm stuffed" to "Sometimes I run/Sometimes I'm stuffed" because the rhythm sounds better to me.
 - B. Do you repeat any words? If so, could you choose a more interesting word instead of repeating it? In my draft I used the word "stuffed" to describe the nose, but then I used the word "stuff" to describe things that the nose smells. This repetition was boring, so I changed it.
 - C. Is there a part that is unclear or confusing? If so, rewrite it so it is clear. The word "blow" can also mean "hit", so I decided to clarify that by focusing on the number of tissues rather than the blowing.
 - D. Can you substitute interesting words for boring ones? "I help you smell" was boring, so I changed it to "I deliver all smells"
 - E. If you want to use rhyme, are there any places where it could fit? As soon as I wrote "feet," I thought of the word "sweet," so I went back and changed "good" to "sweet" to make use of the rhyme.

Do-it-Yourself Activities

- Create a music video relating to ideas in the book with a group. Get creative with song choice, camera angles, images and/or costumes.
- Imagine that Edgar Allan's Official Crime Investigation Notebook is being turned into a movie and make a trailer for it. Try to summarize the storyline in a way that would be interesting to audiences.
- Mr. Crew loves poetry and drinks Tennyson Tea. Create a label or a 3-D box for Tennyson Tea that uses both poetic words and images to entice the customer to buy it.
- Create your own investigation notebook, using one of these official Edgar Allan stickers or your own design. <http://holidayhouse.com/docs/EdgarAllanNotebookStickers.pdf>

Media Center Research

Use your media center or local library and your own brain to discover the answers to the following mysteries:

1. What famous poet is Edgar Allan named after?
2. Mr. Browning, the custodian, and Ms. Barrett, the kindergarten teacher, have famous names. Who were the real Mr. Browning and Ms. Barrett and what were they known for?
3. In Chapter Eighteen, when Mr. Crew sees the kids waiting outside Ms. Blackwell's door, he says "The huddled masses yearning to breathe free have arrived." What famous poem is he quoting from? Who wrote the poem and on what special statue is the poem displayed?
4. Edgar and Destiny write a poem on a stone memorializing Zeus. What is a poem written on a gravestone called?
5. Authors carefully choose details within the story to match or to amplify the themes of the book. What did Mary Amato choose as the project for Edgar's class to work on in Art? Why did she choose this?
6. What is the name of Mr. Crew's favorite tea and why is it significant?

Bonus Mysteries:

Do any of the thief's poems sound familiar to you? The thief "stole" the beginnings of four famous poems by four famous American poets and wrote parodies of these poems. Find the four poems and each poet. Then take the first initial of the first name of each poet (in the order that the poems appear in the book)...what does it spell?!

Many of the characters in *Edgar Allan's Official Crime Investigation Notebook* are named after famous people. See if you can figure out who the following characters are named after.
Edgar's art teacher, Ms. Cassatt
Edgar's music teacher, Ms. Schubert
Edgar's science teacher, Ms. Herschel
Henri's band director, Mr. Copland

Science

What is forensics?

Patrick's father is a forensic chemist. Discuss how Patrick investigates the crimes. How does he use forensics? What tools does he use?

Check out the following activities related to forensics on this great website:

<http://www.forensicscience.org/resources/forensics-for-kids/>