



EPISODE 8 LESSON PLAN

CLIFFHANGERS: A GIRL WHO LOOKS LIKE ME

TEACHER SYNOPSIS

Fiction writing begins with a story idea. In this audio story, the idea comes from a young Arab-American girl who is a fan of mysteries. She works with an adult Arab-American writer to develop her original story idea into the first draft of a cliffhanger—a story that stops at a suspenseful moment, leaving the characters in a desperate state. Listen to learn more about the fiction writing process as well as how authors sometimes give readers an invitation to imagine what might happen next in the story.

STUDENT SYNOPSIS

In this program, a 12-year-old Arab-American girl knows what kind of mystery she wants to read—and write. She meets an author, and they work together to develop her ideas. Listen to learn how mystery writers build suspense into their stories, and hear the final story read aloud.



CRACK A MYSTERY with Susan Muaddi Darraj

Want more resources?
Download our activity-packed companion kits for Episode 8: A Girl Who Looks Like Me on our [website!](#)

LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

- © *Farah Rocks Fifth Grade* - Susan Muaddi Darraj (author), Ruaida Mannaa (illustrator)
- © *Farah Rocks Summer Break* - Susan Muaddi Darraj (author), Ruaida Mannaa (illustrator)
- © *Farah Rocks New Beginnings* - Susan Muaddi Darraj (author), Ruaida Mannaa (illustrator)
- © *Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook* - Ellen Potter & Anne Mazer (authors), Matt Phelan (illustrator)
- © *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* - Chris Van Allsburg
- © *The Treasure of Maria Mamoun* - Michelle Chalfoun

EXTERNAL MATERIALS

Paired text: [Who Was Edgar Allan Poe?](#)
Full podcast: [A Girl Who Looks Like Me](#)
Video: [How to make your writing suspenseful](#) - Victoria Smith
Article: [Agatha Christie facts for kids](#)
Web page: [About Susan Muaddi Darraj](#)
Graphic: [Diversity in Children's Books](#)

Weblinks are embedded into this PDF. Click the hyperlinks to access.

LISTENING GUIDE

BEFORE LISTENING

ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Begin the lesson by asking students to volunteer examples of mystery and detective stories in book, film, TV, or game form. Have them identify characters, plot twists, and other elements of the stories that they like best. Ask questions, such as: *What do you like about reading mysteries? What don't you like? How do the characters in mystery stories behave? How can you tell if a story is a mystery, even if no one identifies the genre for you?*

Preview the vocabulary by reading aloud the terms and their definitions. Ask students to use the words in sentences and discuss the words in the context of their own experience. Spend some time talking about the word *suspense*. Ask students to share experiences they have had with situations that involve suspense, either in a form of entertainment or in real life. Have students share what it feels like when a situation involves suspense, such as waiting on a surprise, and explore how writers can create suspense in their work.

INTRODUCE THE STORY

Say to students: *In this program, a 12-year-old Arab-American girl knows what kind of mystery she wants to read, and to write. She meets an author, also Arab-American, and together they work to develop her ideas. Listen to hear about the process they use to create a mystery story and then to hear a reading of the final story.*

VOCABULARY

- ◎ **incarnate (adj)** – in living form
- ◎ **civilization (noun)** – advanced, organized human society
- ◎ **cliffhanger (noun)** – a story that stops at a suspenseful moment
- ◎ **suspense (noun)** – growing interest and excitement created by uncertainty
- ◎ **session (noun)** – a meeting for a purpose
- ◎ **producer (noun)** – the person in charge of creating a theater show
- ◎ **implore (verb)** – to beg
- ◎ **internship (noun)** – a temporary job for someone in training
- ◎ **unravelled (verb)** – came apart strand by strand
- ◎ **cascaded (verb)** – came tumbling down

DURING LISTENING

Introduce the listening organizers (**BEFORE & AFTER T-CHART** and **LANGUAGE IDENTIFICATION** organizer) to support students in understanding the story while listening to it. They are intended to guide students in taking notes to help them track and focus their listening.

LISTENING ORGANIZERS

★ BEFORE & AFTER T-CHART

In the left column, take notes on the story ideas that are discussed as the story is developed. In the right column, take notes on how the ideas appear in the finished story.

BEFORE: DEVELOPING THE STORY	AFTER: THE FINISHED STORY
<i>Sulaf imagines a mystery story with a girl like herself.</i>	<i>The main character is an Arab-American girl, Layla.</i>

★ LANGUAGE IDENTIFICATION

This organizer allows students to follow along and track important phrases while listening to the story. Listen closely and check off each sentence or partial sentence as you hear it.

- the tail of an Agatha Christie incarnate
- an Arab-American girl like her
- the oldest languages in human civilization
- a character is left in a desperate situation
- when you're making something suspenseful
- help Arab-American kids feel seen
- an adaptation of the poetry
- helped her get a tech crew internship
- someone had had to yank it off
- large roll in the ceiling unraveled

AFTER LISTENING

Ask students to respond to the listening comprehension questions and share their responses with a partner, small group, or the whole class.

LISTENING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- ⦿ What do Sulaf and the author have in common?
- ⦿ What is a cliffhanger, and where does that term come from?
- ⦿ What clues do Sulaf and the author discuss as they develop ideas?
- ⦿ At what point in the finished story does the action end?

REFLECT ON THE STORY


Take time for student reflection on the audio story. Use the discussion questions to focus students on the finished story, "Mystery at the Theater." Have students list details that they think are clues and discuss the author's purpose in providing each clue. Then encourage students to invent or compose endings for the story, making sure to follow through on the clues.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ⦿ What clues did the author add to her mystery story? List the details you think are clues. Discuss why the author might have added each clue to the story.
- ⦿ The author breaks off her reading partway through the story. What do you think happens after this cliffhanger? Imagine the rest of the story, making sure that your story explains the clues that the author planted. Share your story.

★ PAIRED TEXT

Use the Wonderopolis article on [Who Was Edgar Allan Poe?](#) to pair with this audio story. As they are reading, ask students to think about why the authors in the audio story may have decided to include Edgar Allen Poe in their mystery story.

This lesson was developed by  Listenwise for The Story Seeds Podcast™