

# Brainstorms!

## Graphic Organizers & the Writing Process



Grades 3–5

Using AIT Products

- *Club Write Kids*, program 7, “Writing a Mystery”
- *Wordscape*, program 7, “Mystery Words”

### Overview

This lesson plan focuses on the first stage of the writing process, prewriting. Activities are provided to encourage students to brainstorm ideas, capture them quickly, and then organize them in a way that will encourage creative writing. Focusing on the mystery genre, programs from AIT’s series *Club Write Kids* and *Wordscape* will help students learn how to represent their thoughts with pictures, images, and words, creating graphic organizers that spark creativity.

### Objectives

NOTE: Students should have a good working knowledge of story elements before beginning this lesson.

- Recognize the elements of the mystery genre.
- Explore strategies of the prewriting stage of the writing process.

- Brainstorm story elements as a prewriting activity.
- Explore graphic organizers, specifically concept maps, as tools to capture and organize ideas.
- Define and utilize vocabulary associated with mysteries.
- Explore root words, prefixes, and suffixes of words related to mysteries.

### Vocabulary

brainstorm	relationships
concept mapping	subtopics
concepts	topics
diagrams	visualize
organize	writing process
outlines	

NOTE: See Day 2 Vocabulary for mystery-specific words from the *Wordscape* video.

## Preparation

### Materials Needed

- AIT video *Club Write Kids*, program 7, “Writing a Mystery”—CUE the tape to approximate time code 01:32 (about 2 minutes in total length).
- AIT video *Wordscape*, episode 7, “Mystery Words”—CUE the tape to the beginning of the program (two separate clips, about 15 minutes in total length).
- Chart paper or poster board (unlined) — 5–10 sheets
- Markers—5 different colors
- Masking tape
- Timer or clock/watch with a second hand
- HANDOUT: **Mystery Concept Map**—one copy per student
- A ball of yarn (for illustration purposes only)
- HANDOUT: **Mysterious Words**—one copy per student

### Time

This project will take about two 45-minute class periods, plus time set aside for homework and the extension activity.

## Procedure—Day 1

### Introduce Topic: Graphic Organizers

CUE the AIT video from *Club Write Kids*, “Writing a Mystery,” to approximate time code 01:35 and freeze the video on the graphic of the young boy with the words “Prewriting” and “Brainstorm” on screen (the boy appears to have a tornado coming out of his head). Point to the

word “Brainstorm,” and ask students to explain the term. How does the image illustrate the strategy?

Point to the tornado image and explain that the most important part of brainstorming is this idea of a “storm,” the rapid-fire generation of a list of ideas. Words and thoughts should whip around like a storm—each new word sparking ideas for more. A brainstorming activity is not the place to stop and critique or discard any suggested ideas. The important thing is to write down the ideas as quickly as possible, before you forget them. For that reason, brainstorming is a fast and noisy activity!

### Previewing Activity

Conduct a very brief whole-class brainstorming activity to demonstrate how fast and noisy it can be. Write the word “Mystery” on the board, and tell the class that when you say “Go,” you want them to brainstorm as many mysteries as they can. These can be books, short stories, movies, TV shows, cartoons, whatever. Say “Go,” and begin writing as fast as possible. Stop the activity after 30 to 45 seconds.

### Video

Prepare students for watching the video by explaining that this program is part of a series about an after-school writing club. Kids interested in creative writing have formed a club to explore different kinds of writing, meet authors and experts, take field trips, and explore their own creativity. They will be watching a short clip of one story, which shows the steps the club follows in the prewriting stage of the writing process. Tell them to pay close attention to the way Mrs. Ferris organizes the brainstormed ideas on the board.

PLAY the clip of the video when the students in the club learn how to organize their ideas in a concept map. STOP the video at approximate time code 03:37. Ask students why they think



this brainstorming activity wasn't as fast and noisy as theirs.

Explain that the students in Club Write created a concept map about a *genre*, or type of story—in this case, a mystery story. The kids already had prior knowledge about the things that make up a mystery, and their teacher was easily able to organize the brainstormed ideas into the concept map as they called it out.

Draw a circle or oval on the board, and remind students that, as they saw in the video, a concept map begins with a topic, or a “big idea,” written in the center. Write the word “Mystery” in your center shape. Items that go with that topic, called “subtopics,” are written around the outside, circled, and connected to the main topic with lines. Quickly have students review some of the elements of a mystery that were discussed in the video clip. Write and organize those ideas in a similar way on your map.

Make sure students notice that they're brainstorming on several subtopics common to mysteries at once: characters, settings, formats, plot details, and so on. Ask, “Why is it helpful to look for relationships between items after brainstorming?”

Explain that sometimes, however, a topic has so many subtopics that it's difficult to brainstorm everything at once into a concept map. At those times, brainstorming works best if people focus on one subtopic at a time. One way to do this type of specialized brainstorming is to use the Graffiti method.

### Group Work: Graffiti Brainstorm

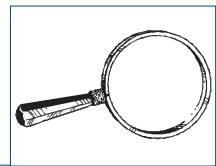
Tape five large sheets of chart paper or poster board in various locations around the room (place them at a level easily reached by students). Try to put as much space between the charts as possible, so groups don't disturb each other while they brainstorm. Each sheet should include a different story element as a subtopic, such as:

- Characters (divide chart into three sections, labeled “Detectives,” “Witnesses and Victims,” and “Culprits”)
- Settings—time
- Settings—place
- Theme—what's the crime?
- Plot—steps to solve the mystery

Divide the class into five groups, and assign (or allow groups to self-select) a recorder for each group. Provide each recorder with a marker—each group should use a different color. Position one group at each of the charts located around the room.

Explain that they will have a very short time to list as many details as possible for the story element written on the chart. Remind the recorders to try to write legibly. NOTE: If any charts become too full, you may need to tape up additional sheets.

Their job is to brainstorm as many details associated with each subtopic as possible. It might



“Write down the thoughts of the moment. Those that come unsought for are commonly the most valuable.”

—Francis Bacon

be helpful to give students an example with some questions to help guide their brainstorming session.

For example, **where** (setting—place) might a mystery be set? If students suggest a general location, such as a “city,” ask them to be more specific: How large is the city? Where in the city—in a building, outside? Is the building a shop or a house? What is around the location—more buildings, land, trees?

During each round, walk around the room, helping groups that seem to be stuck by asking more guiding questions. At the end of the allotted time, groups move to the next chart and wait for the signal to begin brainstorming on that story element. The activity continues until each group has added ideas to every chart.

**NOTE:** The activity usually starts slowly, with groups becoming more comfortable as they see what previous groups have put on each chart. For that reason, more time should be given to the first graffiti session, and less time for the remaining four. You may need to adjust times that work best for your class, but try two minutes for the first round and 45 seconds to a minute for the rest.

After all five rounds have been conducted, move all graffiti charts to the front of the room and review the suggestions listed by each group. Ask students to look for common threads in the lists, and circle ideas that appear to go together.

## Homework

Tell students they should think about the story elements on each of the charts and imagine that they are going to write a mystery. Which elements do they like the best? Give them one or two minutes to jot down their ideas.

Provide students with the **Mystery Concept Map** handout, and explain that their assignment is to use their choices in a concept map for a mystery

they’d like to write. Go over the structure of the worksheet with them, pointing out that the theme may become the title of the story, and reminding them that they should add details and descriptions around specific subtopic areas on the map. Be sure to let them know they can add or remove any details as they go along—the prewriting stage is the time to change your mind!

Encourage students to be creative in their concept maps. They can make a “sloppy copy” of their chart on notebook paper first and save the handout to create the final product; or they can use the handout as the practice map and create their final version on poster board; create a concept map mobile; or design any other type of display they can think of. They can use colors, shapes, and patterns to differentiate subtopics, and might even want to add pictures, drawn or cut from old magazines, to create a visual representation of their story ideas.

## Procedure—Day 2

### Review/Reflection

Divide the class into groups and have them share their concept maps, describing for each other their ideas for a mystery. Collect the concept maps to display in the classroom. As a whole group, discuss the following questions:

- What are some of the elements of the mystery genre?
- Why is brainstorming a useful tool for writers?
- How does a concept map show relationships?
- Besides prewriting, when would be a good time to brainstorm? In what other subject areas?





“There are thousands of thoughts lying within a man that he does not know till he takes up the pen and writes.”

—William Makepeace Thackeray

### **Introduce New Topic: Building a Writer’s Vocabulary**

Now that students have an organized idea of the elements of a mystery story, they have one more exercise to complete before the writing begins: create a bank of words that are most often found in a mystery.

### **Previewing Activity**

Hold up a ball of yarn and ask students to try to guess how it might relate to a mystery story. After students have made some guesses, write the word “clew” on the board. Explain that this is the old English word for a ball of yarn or string. The word originally came from the Greek language, however, and it was used in a famous Greek myth. Ask if anyone knows the story of the minotaur. Read this short description of the story aloud.

There once was a terrible monster called the Minotaur—half man and half bull—that lived in the center of a large and complicated labyrinth, or maze, on the island of Crete near Athens, Greece. Every year the king of Athens was forced to send several young men and women to the island, where they were tossed into the Minotaur’s labyrinth. The labyrinth

was so complicated they couldn’t escape, and they were eventually eaten by the Minotaur.

One year the king’s son, Theseus, swore that he would go with the sacrificed men and women and defeat the Minotaur once and for all. Theseus and the others were thrown into a cell to wait for the sacrifice the next day. But a beautiful princess named Ariadne, who had fallen in love with Theseus at first sight, came to see him that night. She gave Theseus a sword and a ball of yarn—called a **clew** in the Ancient Greek language, and told him what he must do to defeat the monster and escape.

The Minotaur lived in a large labyrinth—a maze that was so complicated no one had ever found the way out. Theseus must use the ball of yarn, unrolling it as he entered the labyrinth. After finding the Minotaur at the center of the maze and using the sword to kill it, Theseus could follow the path of the **clew** to find his way out again. And so he did.

Ever since then, the word “clue” has come to mean a key piece of evidence, or a guide to solve a complex problem. Mystery detectives “follow clues” in the same way that Theseus followed his clew.

### **Video**

Prepare students for watching *Wordscape*, “Mystery Words” by explaining that this series is all about words—how they get their meanings, how adding or removing prefixes and suffixes changes the meanings, and how to solve the “mystery” of an unknown word by examining its parts. Tell them to pay particular attention to the mystery story that flows through the video, and listen for mystery vocabulary used in the skits. CUE the video to the beginning of the program and PLAY to approximate time code 07:55 (after the narrator says “. . . stand up to a second look”). Discuss the words and word cells from the story so far.

CUE the program to the final segment, at approximate time code 08:52 (at the on-screen label, “Our Story Concludes”). Tell students to watch for the host’s description of the word “clue” toward the end of the clip. PLAY through time code 13:48, and freeze the screen on the scrambled word. Have students try to reassemble the syllables to discover the mystery word (“unprotected”).

### Individual Work

Distribute the handout **Mysterious Words**, and provide students with dictionaries or access to computers so that they can research the definitions for part I. Part II is saved for homework.

### Homework

Have students complete the bottom portion of the handout **Mysterious Words**, and bring in their drawings next day to share with their classmates.

## Assessment

### 1. Individual Assessment

Assess each student’s mystery concept map for clarity and accurate organization of ideas. You might also wish to quiz students on the vocabulary associated with the mystery genre, either by creating your own quiz or utilizing interactive quizzes available on the Internet. See **Resources** for one example of an online mystery vocabulary quiz.

### 2. Group Assessment

Evaluate each group’s work in brainstorming story elements. The assessment should reflect evidence of effective participation, collaboration, and consensus, as well as an understanding of the lesson content.

## Extension Activity: Form Your Own Club Write!

Form an after-school or recess creative writing club, inviting students from all classrooms in your grade range. The teaching manual that accompanies the *Club Write Kids* series has many ideas to help you encourage creative writing in your own class, following the techniques and strategies demonstrated in the programs. Or check out the Kidz Writing Club in the **Resources** section.

## Resources

<http://kids.mysterynet.com>

MysteryNet’s Kids Mysteries: An online collection of interactive mystery stories for kids

<http://school.discovery.com/quizzes11/cmatzat/mystery.html>

Mystery Vocabulary Quiz

[www.chrisvanallsburg.com/writestory.html](http://www.chrisvanallsburg.com/writestory.html)

Chris Van Allsburg: Write a Story Web site. Van Allsburg, author of *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, offers an interactive Web site for students to submit their own creative stories, in a variety of genres, based on the intriguing illustrations in that book.

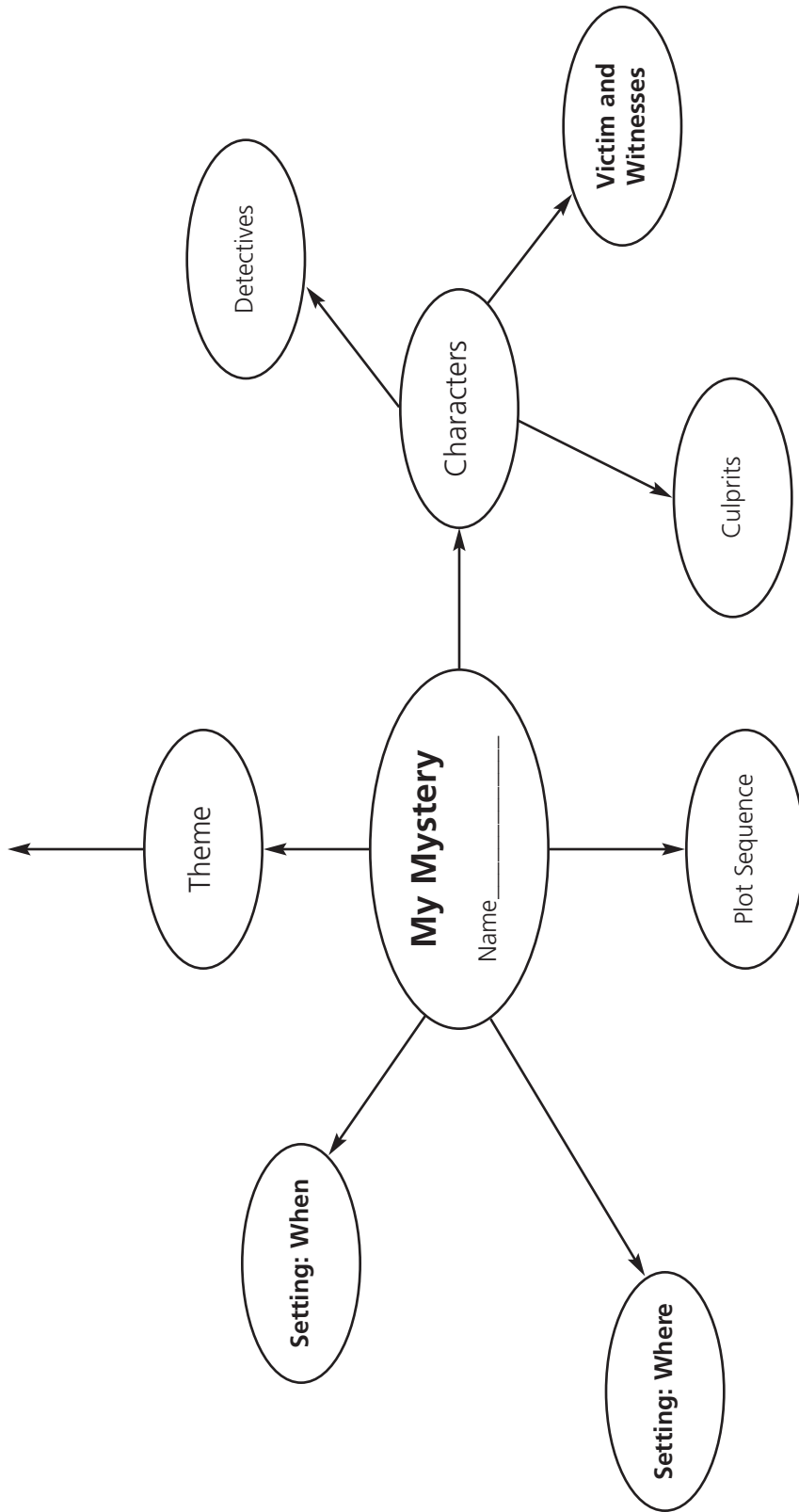
<http://www.worldkids.net/tkwc>

The Kidz Writing Club provides an online forum for children ages 6 to 16 to share stories, find pen pals, enter writing contests, and more.

Tips for Teachers: How to Access AIT Materials without Spending Your Own Nickel(s)

[www.ait.net/technos/e-zine/tech\\_notes/grants.php](http://www.ait.net/technos/e-zine/tech_notes/grants.php)

The Case of the \_\_\_\_\_



# Mysterious Words

<b>From <i>Wordscape</i>:</b>			
hideout	undetected	inspector	mystery
footprint	detection	suspects	mystify
fingerprints	protect	inspect	mysterious
detect	inspect	inspection	clue
detective	suspected	mystic	

I. Write a short definition of each of the following mystery words:

alibi \_\_\_\_\_

crime \_\_\_\_\_

culprit \_\_\_\_\_

deduction \_\_\_\_\_

evidence \_\_\_\_\_

hunch \_\_\_\_\_

motive \_\_\_\_\_

red herring \_\_\_\_\_

sleuth \_\_\_\_\_

suspects \_\_\_\_\_

victim \_\_\_\_\_

witness \_\_\_\_\_

II. Select three words from either list and use them together in a sentence that might be found in your mystery. You may add or remove prefixes and suffixes to create the form of the word that best fits the sentence. Copy the sentence on the back of this paper and draw a picture to illustrate it, one that could also be used in the mystery you are designing.

