



Crack the Crime!

with Cynan Jones



Crack the Crime!

A fun way to look at the events, characters, and circumstances of a story, and write your own imaginative piece in response.

This writing exercise will help you look more deeply at three key elements of story –

- Events – *what* happens
- Characters – *who* it happens to
- Circumstance – *why* what happens happens *when* it does!

Think of a well-known story that has some sort of crime or mystery at its centre.

Choose a story lots of people know. Perhaps a fairy tale, myth or legend, or a story from a religious text.

You are going to **use the story as the basis for an investigation.**

You might choose to be a detective, interviewing suspects and witnesses in an effort to solve the crime.

The responding officer, first on the scene.

Or a super sleuth! A private eye hired by one of the characters in the story to get to the bottom of the mystery.

Maybe you're a journalist who wants to uncover the shocking truth behind events.

Or even a forensic scientist painstakingly finding out everything you can about the scene of crime from the evidence left behind.

The important thing is that you **dig into the details.**

The type of investigator you choose to be will determine how to approach the piece. Each role will require a different way of writing.

If, for example, you are the first officer on the scene, you might want to write a report based on notes you took at the time, giving your initial impressions and the details you noticed. This would require formal, professional language, in 1st person –

I arrived at Granny's house at 4.47 pm after receiving an emergency call. The woodcutter was standing outside the open front door and was covered head to toe in what I immediately took to be blood.

If you are a forensic officer, you could provide an analytical report of the evidence you have uncovered. You would need to present the facts as you have found them, in a scientific way, with perhaps some conjectures as to what the facts reveal –

A sample of slime taken from Red Riding Hood's cloak was found to be high in hydrochloric acid, lipase, and pepsin, consistent with canine gastric juice. This confirms Red Riding Hood spent time inside the wolf's stomach.

If interviewing witnesses, you could present your write-up of the questions and answers. But you could also provide a transcript of the tape recordings. This would show how the person being interviewed speaks, could use colloquialisms or slang perhaps, and be interrupted with other noises (like a cough or crying) –

Detective Jones: So, what alerted you in the first place to the fact the person in the bed was not, actually, your grandmother?

RRH: (Sobbing) The hairy... the big, long, hairy ears. (Sobs).

Should you decide to be a journalist, the type of newspaper you write for would have a big effect on the tone in which you write. Would your article sensationalise the story, using clever headlines and snappy language –

Axe of Bravery!

A local woodcutter came to the rescue last night when dastardly Mr Wolf consumed one of the forest school's brightest students!

Or are you writing for a "serious" broadsheet, in more measured language, perhaps aiming to tell a different side of the story? –

Doubt continues to surround the ongoing investigation into the murder of Mr Wolf and the disappearance of Red Riding Hood's grandmother. It has long been known the woodcutter coveted the grandmother's house in which the body of Mr Wolf was found, and there is now evidence he might have offered the girl a large quantity of sweets to tell lies about her role in events.

Whichever sort of investigator you choose to be, how do you – someone who arrives on the scene knowing nothing, or very little about events – begin to piece together what happened?

When you start to write, keep these points at the forefront of your mind –

- Think hard about what each character would really know.
- What is each character's relationship to the thing(s) that happened? Are they directly involved, or were they a bystander? What is their emotional connection to the victim or object at the centre of the crime?
- Give each of your characters a distinct way of speaking. The way they speak should tell us about the sort of person they are and how they are feeling. To help with this, 'act' out the character's part as you write.
- Make sure you understand what motivates each character to behave the way they do.
- And remember. As with any crime, things aren't always what they at first seem...

Most of all, have fun! The harder you question the story's events, the more intensely you inhabit its characters, and the more deeply you consider how each of the story's elements affect one another, the more you'll surprise yourself (and others!) with the piece you write.

Enjoy!