

# Lesson Title: The Literary Detective and the Case of the Missing Ending

## Materials Needed

- A printed or digital copy of the short story "The Landlady" by Roald Dahl. (A clean, free version is widely available online).
- Notebook or paper for note-taking (can be called a "Case File").
- Pen or pencil.
- Optional Fun Props: A magnifying glass, a notepad, a fedora or trench coat to get into the "detective" role.

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Analyze a complex character's motivations and traits by examining their dialogue and actions.
- Identify and explain the use of literary devices, specifically foreshadowing and situational irony, as "clues" within a narrative.
- Creatively apply their analysis by writing a plausible and compelling new ending to the story that maintains the original author's tone and style.

## Curriculum Standards (Grade 9-10 Equivalent)

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3:** Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5:** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., pacing, flashbacks), and manipulate time create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

## Lesson Activities (Approx. 75-90 minutes)

### Part 1: The Briefing - Accepting the Case (10 minutes)

**Teacher's Role:** Introduce the lesson as a detective assignment.

**Script:** "Welcome, Detective. We have a peculiar case for you today. It involves a writer, Roald Dahl, who left the ending of his story, 'The Landlady,' dangerously open. We know something sinister has happened to the main character, Billy Weaver, but the official report cuts off. Your mission is to read the 'case file'—the story itself—and gather clues. Then, you'll need to write the final part of the report, explaining what happened next. You'll need to pay close attention to the landlady's character and look for any clues Dahl left behind—literary experts call this 'foreshadowing'—to make your conclusion believable."

## Part 2: The Investigation - Collecting Clues (30 minutes)

**Student's Role:** Read "The Landlady" with a detective's mindset. While reading, the student should create a "Case File" in their notebook, dividing a page into two columns: "Clue" and "My Suspicion."

- 1. Read the Story:** The student reads "The Landlady" carefully.
- 2. Gather Evidence:** As they read, they should pause and jot down any strange details, odd phrases, or suspicious actions in the "Clue" column. This is where they will unknowingly be identifying foreshadowing and key character moments.
  - *Example Clue:* The landlady says, "But I'm always ready. Everything is always ready day and night in this house just on the off-chance that an acceptable young gentleman will come along."
  - *Example Clue:* The names in the guestbook (Christopher Mulholland and Gregory W. Temple) sound vaguely familiar to Billy.
  - *Example Clue:* The parrot and the dachshund are stuffed.
- 3. Formulate Theories:** In the "My Suspicion" column, the student writes down what they think each clue might mean. What is the author hinting at? This encourages active reading and analysis.
  - *Example Suspicion for stuffed pets:* "This is very creepy. It shows she likes things to be preserved and unchanging... maybe she does this to her 'guests' too?"
- 4. Final Discussion:** After reading, briefly discuss the findings. What was the most significant clue? What can we say for sure about the landlady's character and her intentions?

## Part 3: The Report - Writing "What Happened Next" (35 minutes)

**Student's Role:** Now, the student acts as both writer and detective to close the case.

**The Task:** "Detective, you've gathered your evidence. Now it's time to file your official closing report. Write a 1-2 page narrative conclusion to 'The Landlady.' Your story should begin right where Dahl's ends (with Billy smelling the bitter almonds in his tea). Your goal is to show, not just tell, what happens to Billy. Use the clues you gathered to make your ending logical and maintain the creepy, suspenseful tone of the original story."

### Creative Prompts to guide the writing:

- What are Billy's final thoughts? Does he realize what is happening?
- What does the landlady say or do after he drinks the tea?
- How do you create suspense in your writing? Use short sentences, sensory details (the smell, the taste, what he sees), and revealing dialogue.
- How will your ending provide a sense of chilling closure?

## Assessment: Closing the Case

The primary assessment is the student's creative writing piece ("The Report"). It is evaluated not for being "right," but for how effectively it uses evidence from the text. Use the following simple rubric for feedback:

Category	Excellent (3 pts)	Good (2 pts)	Needs Improvement (1 pt)
<b>Use of Evidence</b>	The ending logically flows from the clues (foreshadowing) in Dahl's story. It feels like a natural, well-supported conclusion.	The ending connects to some clues from the story but may have a few gaps or inconsistencies.	The ending mostly ignores the clues from the original story and feels disconnected.

<b>Tone &amp; Style</b>	The writing skillfully mimics Dahl's creepy, suspenseful, and subtly humorous tone.	The writing attempts to match the original tone but may occasionally slip into a different style.	The tone of the ending is very different from the original story (e.g., it's an action scene, purely comedic, etc.).
<b>Characterization</b>	The landlady and Billy act consistently with how they were portrayed in the original text. Their dialogue and actions are believable.	The characters are mostly consistent, but one or both may say or do something slightly out of character.	The characters behave in ways that contradict their established personalities.

## Differentiation

### For Extra Support:

- Before writing, work together to brainstorm three possible things that could happen to Billy, based on the clues.
- Provide sentence starters for the creative writing portion, such as: "As the bitter almond taste spread, Billy's head began to feel..." or "The landlady watched him, a gentle smile on her face. 'More tea, Mr. Weaver?' she asked, though she knew..."

### For an Extra Challenge:

- **The Landlady's Diary:** Instead of writing from Billy's perspective or a third-person view, write the ending as a diary entry from the landlady's point of view. This requires a deeper dive into her psychology.
- **The Police Report:** Write the ending as an official police report filed years later when the cold case of the missing boys is re-opened. This would require a formal, objective tone while still hinting at the sinister truth discovered.