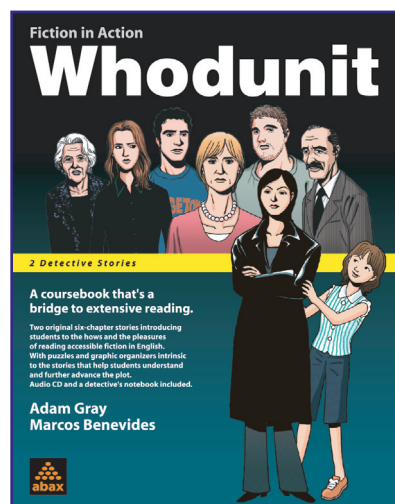


Fiction in Action: Whodunit

Adam Gray and Marcos Benevides

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In November 2010, *Fiction in Action: Whodunit* won the HRH The Duke of Edinburgh ESU English Language Book Award. Soon afterwards, the authors won the 2011 ELTons Cambridge ESOL International Award for Innovation. *Fiction in Action: Whodunit* is a book in itself worthy of winning prestige awards. It is also the world's first Free-to-Share Commercial ELT textbook, published under a Creative Commons licence, available both as a traditional print edition and as a pay-what-you-can eBook. More information about these purchasing options can be found at www.abax.net.

Fiction in Action: Whodunit contains two original six-chapter police detective stories. The first, *The Inverted Eagle*, is about a robbery with a drugging that goes wrong. Detective Eliana 'Ellie' Koo is called in to assist Officer Kazuo Yokota in the investigation, which, of course, has a surprise ending. In the second story, *Death on U Street*, Ellie and Officer Yokota team up again to investigate the mysterious death of a security guard and unravel a series of lies and deception.

Because I was working a 12-week term, this book fitted nicely, with one chapter a week. We completed the first chapter in class together to get the students used to completing the puzzles and quizzes. They then read one chapter

a week for homework. Each chapter ends with a Review and one morning a week the students worked in groups to complete it.

The Introduction explains the purpose of the pre-reading section at the beginning of each chapter. It also explains that clues in the story will be marked with a fingerprint alerting students to important information nearby. There are also interactive illustrations to assist comprehension, such as a family tree of the victim's family, which the students are asked to complete. Near the end of each chapter, after the comprehension questions, there is a puzzle to work on. Gradually a secret message is revealed. The twist is that if the students answer the comprehension question incorrectly, the message will be nonsensical, prompting them to check and correct their own answers.

I discovered that the students got extremely involved in the Review as they worked to make sense of the text. For example, I often saw them finding a section in the book (usually one of those with fingerprints) and reading it aloud to their group to try and prove that their answer was correct. Sometimes they compared the wording of the clues to decide which one was most important. All this without any prompting from their teacher!

The print version of the book includes a CD-ROM with listening for each chapter. For example, for Chapter 1 the students listen to the 9-1-1 call made by the housekeeper and together answer comprehension questions about her phone call.

Another advantage of the print version is that it comes with a Detective's Notebook, in which students are encouraged to record new words and important points about the case, and then to write a short summary of each chapter and a final report. This really engaged my students.

In class I supplemented the book with some work about the role of police in society and some popular television whodunit programmes. I was surprised at how many students told me that they found it much easier now to understand crime news and television detective stories. Some of the students who studied this book last term are with me again this term, selecting books from the library and writing weekly summaries of those books. As the blurb on the back cover of *Whodunit* says "Having successfully closed the cases in these two stories, students can go on to read other appropriately leveled readers on their own".

I highly recommend this book because the stories are not only engaging but I witnessed reading comprehension at a higher level than I have ever seen before. No wonder it has won two prestigious awards!

Glenda Inverarity

Glenda Inverarity taught ESL in Asia for seven years and is currently undertaking her Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics at the University of Adelaide and teaching ESL to migrants.

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