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| Unit 4 /Week 5 |
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| Title: Encyclopedia Brown and the Case of the Slippery Salamander by Donald J. Sobol |
| Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day) |
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| Common Core ELA Standards: RL.4.1, RL.4.2, RL.4.3, RL.4.4, RL.4.9 (additional task #1); W.4.2, W.4.4, W.4.9; SL.4.1; L.4.1, L.4.2, L.4.4 |
| Teacher Instructions |
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| **Before Teaching** |
| 1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers, about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task. |
| Big Ideas and Key Understandings  Focusing on important details and using logic can help solve a mystery or crime. |
| Synopsis  Leroy Brown, otherwise known as Encyclopedia for the amount of facts he knows, is a great detective and helps his father solve crimes. One night at dinner, they discuss the details of the case of the stolen salamander, which includes the suspects, Doctor Donnell, Mrs. King, and Sam Maine. Encyclopedia solves the crime of the stolen salamander when one suspect makes a mistake on one important detail that salamanders are amphibians, not reptiles. When caught, Sam admits to stealing the salamander, gave the salamander back to the aquarium, and was fired from his job. |
| 1. Read the entire main selection text, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings. 2. Re-read the main selection text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Vocabulary. |
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| **During Teaching** |
| 1. Students read the entire main selection text independently. 2. Teacher reads the main selection text aloud with students following along. (Depending on how complex the text is and the amount of support needed by students, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.) 3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions and returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e.: whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.) |
| Text Dependent Questions |

| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
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| Idaville is not a real place, but the author includes details to make it seem real. Find at least three details that the author uses to make Idaville, the **setting** of the story, seem real. | The text states that, “Idaville looked like an ordinary seaside town.” The author writes that it is a seaside town with churches, car washes, movie theaters, bike paths, beaches, a synagogue, and great fishing spots. These locations and businesses are all part of a “real” place in which the illustrator drew it to match yet the town Idaville is not real. |
| Use at least two pieces of evidence to infer which character will likely solve the problem in the story. | It can be inferred that the main character Leroy Brown, or otherwise known as Encyclopedia will be the person to solve the crime. People call him Encyclopedia because he knows so many facts which could be beneficial in solving crimes. The author states that he has “amazing talent as a crime-solver,” and his dad doesn’t solve the crimes even though he is the Chief, “the brains behind it all was his ten-year-old son.” These statements in the text can help the reader confirm the inference that Encyclopedia will solve the crime. |
| What was the crime that the chief could not solve? | “There was a theft at the aquarium today.” Fred, a tiger salamander, had been stolen from the aquarium. The Chief couldn’t figure out who stole the salamander. |
| The author writes about the Den of Darkness and what animals are **exhibited** there. What does “exhibited” mean here? Are **salamanders** and **reptiles** the same or different? Use the text to support your answer. | Exhibited means to be shown or put on display. The author writes: “Encyclopedia especially liked visiting the frogs and salamanders in the amphibian section.” This piece of information shows that salamanders are amphibians, not reptiles. There are two different sections in the den, one for amphibians and one for reptiles. The statement above can help the reader infer that the salamander is an amphibian and therefore, must be different. |
| How does Mrs. Brown interact with Chief Brown when they talk about the **crime**? Give specific examples from the text.  (Note for teacher: For advanced students, you may wish to introduce the term **exposition** as the part of the story where details about characters are shared.) | Mrs. Brown helps Chief Brown by asking him questions about the details of the crime. For example, she asks him, “Do you have any clues, dear?”, “Why would someone steal a salamander?”, “Do you think a visitor might have stolen him?” and “Did you question the three of them?” Her questions clarify his facts. |
| Using details from the text, which characters had access to the stolen salamander, and what did they claim to be doing when the salamander went missing? | Mrs. King, Sam Maine, and Dr. O’Donnell all had access to the salamander that morning. Dr. O’Donnell was “examining a new crocodile,” and Sam Maine was “cleaning out exhibits and feeding some of the lizards.” Mrs. King was with a group of school children and then went on a coffee break. |
| How does the Chief’s view of Mrs. King change as he moves through the investigation? Cite evidence in the text to support your answer. | At first the Chief seems suspicious of Mrs. King. Sam suggested to the Chief that he was suspicious of her, which made the Chief more suspicious as well. Then when the Chief talked with her, she mentioned that she was very interested in salamanders, which made him even more suspicious. The text even states that she is “fascinated with salamanders.” It is also reported that the missing animal “is the first tiger salamander that she’s ever seen.” This detail could be considered a motivation for her to steal the salamander along with the detail that she has “dozens of them at home as pets.” When the chief interviews the cashier and they claim to have seen her, plus she was with school children, it seems unlikely that she had a real opportunity to steal the salamander. |
| Encyclopedia asked one question that solved the problem in the story. What was the question and how did it help in solving the problem? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. | Encyclopedia’s one question was “Has Sam Maine been working at the aquarium long, Dad?” This question led the Chief to state the most important detail in solving the crime. Sam said in the text that, “he’s been taking care of salamanders and other lizards for more than nineteen years.” Encyclopedia knew that salamanders are not lizards and if Sam had been working with these animals for that long, he’d know it too. That meant that Sam was lying. |
| According to the text what happens to Sam after he is caught? | Upon further **investigation** or questioning, Sam “admitted to stealing the valuable new tiger salamander.” The text states that Sam admitted stealing the salamander, returned the salamander to the aquarium and was fired from his job as caretaker. |

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| Vocabulary |

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|  | **KEY WORDS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING**  Words addressed with a question or task | **WORDS WORTH KNOWING** |
| **TEACHER PROVIDES DEFINITION**  not enough contextual clues provided in the text | case  exhibit  maintaining  opportunity  experience  classified | ordinary  resided  aquarium  reptiles  amphibians  salamanders  employees  volunteers  suspicious  confided  fascinated  specimen  baffled  admitted  valuable |
| **STUDENTS FIGURE OUT THE MEANING**  sufficient context clues are provided in the text | encyclopedia  crime  stumped  cracked | crooks  boast  reference book  sacred creatures  caretaker |

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| Culminating Task   * *How did Encyclopedia Brown solve the case of the missing salamander? Write a well-crafted paragraph and cite evidence from the text. Please make sure to use proper capitalization, punctuation and grammar within your writing.*    + Sample Answer: Encyclopedia Brown focuses on a key detail when solving the mystery. He is able to solve the salamander mystery very quickly as he listened to his parents’ conversation over dinner. The Chief had the final detail but Encyclopedia makes sense of it. When Encyclopedia identifies the most important detail, the author writes: “That was all Encyclopedia needed to hear. ‘Oh no, he hasn’t!’ Encyclopedia declared with a satisfied smile. ‘If he’s a lizard expert, then I’m the Queen of England! Sam Maine is lying, and I can prove it!’” This quote shows that Encyclopedia Brown only needed one detail, or missing piece in the puzzle, to solve the mystery. He knew that, “anyone who’d taken care of salamanders for that long would know that salamanders are not lizards.” Encyclopedia’s precision in listening for details helped him to solve the mystery of the missing Salamander.   Additional Tasks (optional) |
| 1. *Compare and contrast Jean-Francois from The Seeker of Knowledge VS. Encyclopedia – both use logic and one detail to solve the problem in the text, yet circumstances are different. How did Encyclopedia Brown solve the case of the missing salamander? How is this similar and different to Jean-Francois solving the mystery of ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics? What did both characters do that affected the plot of the story? Complete a chart comparing the two stories’ plots. Use evidence from the texts to support your answer. Write two paragraphs: one citing similarities and one citing differences.*   Sample Chart/ Plot Maps for Compare and Contrast:   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | **Encyclopedia Brown:**  **Case of Missing Salamander** | **Seeker of Knowledge:**  **The Man Who Deciphered Egyptian Hieroglyphics** | | **Genre** | Realistic Fiction | Biography/ Literary Nonfiction (written with literary elements) | | **Setting** | Idaville: imaginary seaside town; Current time | Paris and other cities in France; Late 1700s-early 1800s | | **Main Character/ Hero** | Leroy Brown, A.K.A. Encyclopedia Brown | Jean-Francois Champollion | | **Problem/ Conflict** | Tiger Salamander is stolen from aquarium | No one can decipher the ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphics | | **Rising Action** | Chief reviews details of the crime from his initial investigation:   * Salamander taken between 10:30 and 11:45 * Three people had access to Salamander as it was not on display to public * Dr. O’Donnell was examining new crocodile from Australia * Sam Maine was cleaning out exhibits and feeding lizards * Mrs. King was with school children from 10:30-11:15 and then went on a coffee break * Sam Maine hints that he is suspicious of Mrs. King because “she’s fascinated with salamanders” and “has dozens of them as pets.” | Once Jean-Francois became interested in Egypt and discovered that no on could read the ancient writing, he said, “Then I will one day!” He begins his mission:   * Reads as many books as possible * Copies down hieroglyphics in notebooks * Goes to Paris and meets scholars studying the Rosetta stone, although he is not allowed to work with them * He teaches his students about Egypt * He talks with Napoleon about his dream and Napoleon promises to send Jean-Francois sometime in the future * He must escape the cities when Napoleon is defeated and people are angry with anyone connected to Napoleon * During this time, an Englishman discovers the King Ptolemy’s name using a few of the hieroglyphs from the Rosetta stone * He finally retrieves his notebooks and heads back to Paris. He is 30 years old. * He studies the Rosetta stone in Paris, but there are too many hieroglyphs that he can’t figure out. | | **Climax** | Encyclopedia asks his one question which leads the Chief to reveal the most important detail. Sam claims that he has “been taking care of salamanders and other lizards for more than nineteen years.” Salamanders are not lizards, so Sam is lying! | September of 1822, he receives a package with deciphered pharaohs’ names copied from temple walls. He realizes that the link—the pictures were for whole words, sounds, and letters mixed together! He rushes to tell his brother, but collapses. | | **Resolution/ Solution** | Upon further investigation or questioning, Sam admits that he stole the salamander. He returns the salamander and is fired from his job. | When he recovered, he wrote about his discovery. A few years later, he finally arrives in Egypt! “He pressed his ear to the stone and listened to the ancient voices.” | |

Sample answer:

The major similarity between Encyclopedia and Jean-Francois is that they are both solving a mystery. Both needed others to provide details to help them solve the mystery. Encyclopedia received information from his parents, and Jean-Francois received information from other scholars and his brother. The Chief had the final detail but Encyclopedia makes sense of it, and Jean-Francois had a friend provide him with the final detail he needed to make sense of the structure of the written language. When Encyclopedia identifies the most important detail, the author writes: “That was all Encyclopedia needed to hear. ‘Oh no, he hasn’t!’ Encyclopedia declared with a satisfied smile. ‘If he’s a lizard expert, then I’m the Queen of England! Sam Maine is lying, and I can prove it!’” The moment Jean-Francois found the link, the author writes: “’Thothmes!’ Jean-Francois suddenly exclaimed, and the rushing sound of the pharaoh’s name, as if carried on wings across the centuries, filled the room.” Both these quotes show that both characters needed only one detail, or missing piece in their puzzle, to solve their mystery.

The major differences between Encyclopedia and Jean-Francois are: one is fictional and one is real, one solves many mysteries in a short time while the other solves one mystery over many years. Encyclopedia is able to solve the salamander mystery very quickly as he listened to his parents’ conversation over dinner and asked one question to reveal the missing detail. He also solves multiple mysteries, “For more than a year, no child or grownup had gotten away with breaking a law.” However it wasn’t Chief Brown solving the crimes, “No, the brains behind it all was his ten-year-old son, Encyclopedia.” Whereas, Jean-Francois learned of the mystery early in his life and only through many years of study and research was he able to solve his mystery. The author states that he was seven when his older brother told him about Napoleon uncovering the past in Egypt. It wasn’t until 1822, when he was 32 years old that he actually solved his mystery by finding the link between the hieroglyphs and what they represented. The author writes: “The pictures were sounds, too. Not single letters, but syllables, even whole words!”

1. Use Leveled Readers for further reading of mysteries
2. Website that provides kid friendly definitions of the elements of story or plot: <http://www.learner.org/interactives/story/climax.html> (the definitions can be read aloud by the website)

Notes to Teacher

* Differentiation Ideas:
  + Complete the evidence chart for the compare/contrast activity together as a class.
  + Students could write in pairs sharing the writing.
  + Discuss the use of, or lack of, dialogue between the prior story: Seeker of Knowledge and this story: Encyclopedia Brown. One has dialogue; the other does not. How does this affect the plot or why would the author’s choose to use, or not use, dialogue?
  + Discuss Topic: True story- literary nonfiction vs. fictional - how does that affect the plot? Was one more complex than the other? Using evidence from the texts, tell why?
* Please make sure to discuss the differences between reptiles and amphibians *before* reading the text.
  + The main **differences between reptiles and amphibians** are that **reptiles** are covered in dry scales or scutes, while **amphibians** have moist skins. **Amphibians** also produce eggs that are dependent for the most part on water and moisture, while **reptiles** have shelled-eggs that are terrestrially adapted.