

3–7 Grade ELA Lesson Plan

Howliday Inn (Bunnicula Series) by James Howe, illustrated by Stephen Gilpin

Grade Levels

3–7

Time

45–60 minutes

Common Core State Standards (CCSS ELA)

- **RL.3–7.1:** Ask and answer questions using evidence from the text.
 - **RL.3–7.2:** Determine the theme or central message.
 - **RL.3–7.3:** Describe how characters respond to challenges and how their actions move the plot.
 - **RL.3–7.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases, including figurative language, that contribute to mystery and humor.
 - **RL.3–7.6:** Explain how the narrator's point of view influences the story.
 - **RL.3–7.7:** Analyze how illustrations contribute to mood, suspense, and characterization.
 - **W.3–7.3:** Write narratives using descriptive details and clear event sequences.
 - **SL.3–7.1:** Participate effectively in collaborative discussions.
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Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze how mystery, suspense, and humor work together in the story.
 - Explore themes of friendship, courage, loyalty, and critical thinking.
 - Identify clues and make predictions using evidence from the text and illustrations.
 - Examine how Chester's narration shapes readers' understanding of events.
 - Write an original mystery story featuring animal characters.
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Essential Questions

- What makes a good mystery?
- How do fear and imagination influence our decisions?
- Why is it important to gather evidence before reaching conclusions?

- How does a narrator's point of view affect a story?
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Materials

- *Howliday Inn*
 - Mystery Clue Graphic Organizer
 - Sticky Notes
 - Chart Paper
 - Writing Journals or Notebook Paper
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Vocabulary

- Mystery
 - Suspense
 - Clue
 - Inference
 - Prediction
 - Narrator
 - Point of View
 - Evidence
 - Conflict
 - Resolution
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Before Reading (10 minutes)

Activate Prior Knowledge

Ask students:

- What makes a story mysterious?
- Have you ever jumped to the wrong conclusion because something seemed scary?
- Why do people enjoy spooky stories?
- What clues help detectives solve mysteries?

Students complete a **Think-Pair-Share**, then discuss responses as a class.

During Reading (25 minutes)

Mystery Detective Log

Students collect clues throughout the story.

Mystery	Clues	Prediction	What Really Happened?
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Encourage students to notice:

- Chester's observations
- Harold's reactions
- Bunnacula's behavior
- Suspicious characters
- Setting details
- Illustrations that hint at clues
- Red herrings (false clues)

Class Discussion

Discuss:

1. Why does Chester believe something dangerous is happening?
2. Which clues are helpful, and which are misleading?
3. How does Harold react differently from Chester?
4. How do the illustrations build suspense and humor?
5. What lesson do the characters learn by the end of the story?

Mini-Lesson

Separating Evidence from Assumptions

Explain that detectives use **evidence**, not just guesses.

Create a class chart.

Evidence	Assumption
A character disappears.	A werewolf took them.
Strange howling is heard.	It must be a monster.

Discuss how readers can make stronger predictions by using facts from the story instead of assumptions.

Collaborative Activity (10–15 minutes)

Solve the Mystery

Divide students into small groups.

Provide each group with a short mystery scenario (real or fictional).

Groups answer:

- What is the mystery?
- What clues are available?
- What questions still need answers?
- What conclusion can you make using evidence?

Groups present their detective work.

Writing Activity (20–25 minutes)

Writing Prompt

Imagine you and your favorite pet are staying at a mysterious hotel where strange noises echo through the halls every night. Soon, guests begin disappearing, and everyone has a different explanation. Write a mystery story describing the clues you discover, the suspects you investigate, and how you solve the case. Include descriptive details, dialogue, suspense, and a surprising ending that explains the mystery.

Extension Activities

Grades 3–4

Create a Mystery Animal

Invent an animal detective.

Include:

- Name
- Special detective skill
- Favorite clue-finding tool
- Personality

- Illustration
 - One mystery they would like to solve
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Grades 5–7

Point of View Rewrite

Rewrite one important scene from Harold's or Bunnacula's point of view.

Explain how changing narrators changes the reader's understanding of the story.

Mystery Comic

Create a six-panel comic showing:

- Arrival at a spooky inn
 - A mysterious event
 - Gathering clues
 - A surprising suspect
 - Solving the mystery
 - The final explanation
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Assessment

Formative

- Mystery Detective Log
 - Class discussions
 - Group collaboration
 - Reading observations
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Summative Writing Rubric

Criteria	4	3	2	1
Mystery Elements	Suspenseful, creative, complete	Clear mystery	Some mystery elements	Limited

Criteria	4	3	2	1
Organization	Logical sequence	Mostly organized	Some organization	Difficult to follow
Evidence & Clues	Strong clues and resolution	Clear clues	Limited clues	Few clues
Conventions	Few errors	Some errors	Frequent errors	Many errors

Exit Ticket

Students answer one question:

- Which clue was the most important?
- Why is Chester not always a reliable detective?
- What makes a mystery exciting?
- What advice would you give Chester before his next adventure?

Differentiation

Support

- Graphic organizers
- Partner reading
- Sentence starters
- Teacher-guided discussion
- Visual vocabulary cards
- Read-aloud support, if available

Extension

- Compare *Howliday Inn* with another mystery story, identifying similarities and differences in suspense, clues, and resolution.
- Write a sequel featuring Harold, Chester, and Bunnacula solving a new mystery at another unusual location.
- Research the literary elements of mystery stories (such as suspects, motives, red herrings, and plot twists) and create a classroom guide for future mystery readers.

Cross-Curricular Connections

Science: Investigate real animal behaviors often associated with myths (wolves, bats, owls, rabbits) and compare scientific facts with fictional portrayals.

Art: Design a spooky inn or mystery scene using illustrations that create mood through shadows, expressions, and background details.

Drama: Perform a mystery scene, encouraging students to use voice, movement, and expression to build suspense while classmates identify clues.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Connection

Students reflect on:

- Critical thinking
 - Courage
 - Friendship
 - Open-mindedness
 - Problem-solving
 - Responsible decision-making
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Big Idea

Howliday Inn reminds readers that mysteries are solved through observation, careful thinking, and teamwork—not by jumping to conclusions. Through humor, suspense, and memorable animal characters, students learn the importance of questioning assumptions, examining evidence, and supporting friends even in the most mysterious situations.