The Case of the Frantic Librarian

This story is meant to be a fun mystery to go over some of the different things you can do in the library. In it, the main character solves the mystery of the library using the resources of the library, and so can you! Over the two weeks, there will be an activity for you to complete during help period or other free times. It will help you to explore the mystery of the library and find out what the library has to offer you. You don’t have to complete the activity unless your teacher brings you in to do it, but it won’t take long and all students who turn in a completed worksheet will be entered into a raffle.

Cast of Characters

**You**- A student willing to take on the mystery of the Learning Technology Center (LTC) out of the goodness of your heart, to help Ms. Kinsey, and because you never know what type of award might wait for the person who solves the mystery. You seem to have put your sweatshirt on backwards after lunch, but nobody is perfect.

**Ms. Kinsey**- The librarian in the LTC who loves to see books checked out, but hates to see books lost or stolen. She can often be heard mumbling to herself “All they had to do was put their name and grade on the little card in the back of the book, and stick the card in the slot on the Circulation Desk. They aren’t even asked to date it!”

**LTC**- The Learning Technology Center, where books, computers, and comfortable chairs meet to create a fun learning environment. With its back corners and shelves of books to explore, it has a character all its own.

**Sherlock Holmes**- One of the great fictional detectives of literature. His logical mind has been proven to solve almost any mystery.

**Melville Dewey**- The man who invented the Dewey Decimal System, a system to catalogue books by topic and genre rather as well as by author and title. Under his system, the library is split into sections such as Fiction, Biography, History, Social Sciences, and more.

**Andrew Carnegie**- An immigrant and self-made multi-millionaire, Carnegie felt it was his duty to use his money for the good of the community. One of Carnegie's lifelong interests was the establishment of free public libraries to make available to everyone a means of self-education. There were only a few public libraries in the world when, in 1881, Carnegie began to promote his idea. He and the Corporation subsequently spent over $56 million to build 2,509 libraries throughout the English-speaking world. During his lifetime, Carnegie gave away over $350 million. That was after selling the empire he built for $450 million.

(Information taken from http://www.carnegie.org/sub/about/biography.html)

??? Mystery Character- A mysterious man wanders the library. He may be of some help to you, but only time will tell.

The Story

You are sitting in the Learning Technology Center (LTC) doing your math homework one day when you suddenly hear a shriek from Ms. Kinsey, the librarian.

“Gone! Gone! The Prince is gone!”

And you wonder what prince she is talking about, because even with all the visitors currently in the school you haven’t heard that any of them were royalty. You race to the back of the room and find Ms. Kinsey pointing in horror to an empty slot on the shelf. The prince must be a character in the book that is missing.

Unfortunately, all attempts to get more information out of Ms. Kinsey fail. She is far too upset to be able to give details. All you know is that a book is missing, and if you don’t find it, maybe nobody will.
Having read a good number of mysteries, you decide to question witnesses first. There is someone sitting at one of the LTC computers with a view of the crime scene. You approach the student and demand to know what she has seen.

The student seems startled by you and, in a confused voice, says “Well, not much, but I did see the capitol building in Washington, D.C. last spring. Someday I hope to see the Eiffel Tower.”

You soon realize that the student was so busy typing up her paper that she was oblivious to the crime . . . or so she says. You realize that questioning everybody might not be the fastest method of solving this case, so you stop to think for a minute. Suddenly you feel a hand on your shoulder.

“Pardon me,” you hear a voice say.

You turn around to see an adult man standing behind you. He looks vaguely familiar, like he fits the description of someone you once read about, and you assume he is one of the visitors on a tour of the school. He is tall and thin and wears a funny hat. You’re so busy concentrating on remembering who he reminds you of that you don’t hear what he says.

“Excuse me?”

“What I said is that I thought you might consider exploring the scene of the crime before anything else.”

“Oh, but what if the witnesses get away?”

“You know all the students here, make a list and question them later. Then go explore the crime scene. You don’t even know what’s missing.”

You see the wisdom in his advice and quickly jot down a list of who is in the library. You notice a few adults you do not recognize and deciding that you can ask Ms. Kinsey who was visiting later. You notice that it’s a funny group of adults. They must be visiting from all over, because no two outfits appear to come from the same place.

You turn around to invite the man you’ve been speaking with to help (he does seem to know an awful lot about crime scenes and he could really help you make progress in this case). He’s already gone. You think to yourself that he moves pretty quickly as you pick up a copy of a Sherlock Holmes mystery that is lying open on a table behind you and place it on the circulation cart to be reshelved.

Thinking about Sherlock Holmes, you decide that more information about crime solving might help you with the case. Ms. Kinsey’s been reading a lot of mysteries recently and has been raving about a book entitled Cracking Cases: The Science of Solving Crimes by Henry C. Lee. You know the LTC doesn’t have a copy.

You hear another male voice say: “I work so hard to make sure people have access to libraries in their neighborhoods, and now I find every school with a big library!”

You turn to the speaker and find a well dressed man in an old-fashioned suit. You wish that the LTC had every book you might ever want to read, especially now when you need a specific title. You respond to the man saying: “Even with so many books in it, the LTC doesn’t always have the information I want or need.”

“Neither did all of my libraries, but that’s why I created a system of related libraries. If one library didn’t have a book, the other might.”

A memory twinges at the back of your mind. Somehow the information this strange man just gave you might solve your problem. You suddenly remember Ms. Kinsey mentioning that the LTC is just one in a system of
local school libraries. If another school has the book but Doane Stuart doesn’t, you can ask for an Inter-Library Loan and the book will arrive within a week!

You open your eyes, which have been closed in concentration, only to come to two realizations at once. The first is that you don’t have a week to solve the mystery. Overnight, maybe, but not a week! The second is that this man seems to have disappeared as quickly as the first, but a book remains on the table where he was leaning. It’s a biography of Andrew Carnegie, a self-made millionaire and builder of public libraries.

“He must have solved a lot of problems to get where he did in life. If he can do all that, then I can figure out another way to find this book!” And you realize that you have the answer! You were planning to go to your local library after school anyways, so why not read the book there!

You plan to look in your library’s online catalogue later for Cases: The Science of Solving Crimes, but first you decide to do as much as you can with the information you have. Returning to the crime scene, you realize that you have an advantage. Ms. Kinsey might have been lead off by other teachers for comfort, but you can still figure out which book is missing. You have a card catalogue, and a subject to search! You turn around and rush towards the other side of the room.

Once you reach the card catalogue, you go to the “t” section to look up “the prince”. There is nothing under “the”. You are so distressed that you almost go back to the table to finish your math homework when another strange man appears at your side.

“That’s not the way the system works,” he says as he looks over your shoulder.

What does he mean? You have studied card catalogues and know that you can search by title, author, and many subjects! You can’t imagine that there would be no subject listing for princes . . . oh, wait.

“‘Prince’, not ‘the prince’!” you say as you smack yourself in the head.

You quickly move to the “p” section and begin your search again. When you get to the subject “prince”, you give a groan. This library is full of information on princes! Prince Charles, Prince the singer, Prince Edward Island in Canada, and more! It’ll take ages to search the library with these cards to see which is the missing prince!

The strange man beside you chuckles and repeats “That’s not the way the system works.”

You spin around and demand that he stop being so mysterious and tell you what he means.

“Just as the card catalogue has its form of organization, so too does the library. I worked hard to make sure the library was easy to search. The library is divided into sections categorized by number. Each number is connected to a subject. Even if you were to look up each entry in the card catalogue, it wouldn’t take you too long. But you don’t need the numbers on the cards to lead you around the sections of the library, you know where the book was stolen from.”

As you gaze back into the library, you realize he is correct. The book is obviously missing from the Fiction section. You turn to thank him, but he is nowhere to be found. On top of the card catalogue, you find a book on the Dewey Decimal System. You place it on the circulation cart to be reshelved.

You quickly check all of the Prince entries found in the fiction section and find that no book is missing.

Your math homework is looking good again, but as you look at the empty spot on the shelf, you notice something new. A thin sheet of paper sits next to the empty place where the prince should rest. When you pick it up, you realize that it doesn’t belong in the library collection. It has no identifying labels, stamps,
barcodes, or circulation cards that it would have if it had been processed or catalogued.

It Reads: The book that is missing should not have been here. It does not even deserve to be in no man’s land. You’ll never find me, but I might send you a postcard.

You realize that notes in mysteries often contain hidden clues, but you haven’t got a clue what this note means. You stare at the note for a couple of minutes, and realize that the first thing to do is to find out what “no man’s land” is.

You look over at the reference section of the library. You see a variety of encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other information books.

“I bet there’s a lot of good information on no man’s land in there,” you think.

But you realize the investigation might continue for a day or two, and you want to be able to have as much information to take home as possible. Like most reference sections in libraries, the reference books in the LTC are not available to be checked out and you don’t want to have to photocopy the information.

You could use an internet search engine to find the answers, but you want really reliable information. You suddenly remember that all the computers in the LTC are equipped with Encarta, an encyclopedia program. Not only should it have the information you want, it is information you can trust and information you can print out.

After using Encarta, you realize knowing what no man’s land is will not help your search and yet again you’re considering giving up and returning to your math homework. You still don’t know what’s been stolen, why, or by whom.

“You who is the Prince?” you ask aloud. “Who is the Prince? If only I could find a Prince!”

You hear somebody clear his throat behind you and you spin around in frustration. Another of the strange visitors is looking at you expectantly.

“What do you want? Who are you? Why do you people keep bothering me?”

You know you’re being rude, but you’ve had a long day.

“My name is Mr. Printz . . .”

“Mr. WHO???”

“No, not Mr. Who, Mr. Michael Printz . . . did you call my name?”

You shut your eyes and sit down suddenly. Mr. Printz? Could that really be the answer? Is he the missing prince? Could it be a missing person rather than a missing book? Then why was there the mysterious note? Just who is Mr. Printz?

When you open your eyes to ask him, he’s disappeared just like the other men who’ve helped you today. In desperation, you decide to use the internet to discover his identity. You find an entry on the Michael L. Prince Award site located at www.ala.org/yalsa/printz/. The award is given each year to some of the best young adult (that’s you!) literature books and is named after a school librarian from Kansas.

Now you know who the prince is. But what is missing from the collection? The mysterious note indicated that a book unfit for no man’s land was removed from the library.
No man’s land . . . there was a book on the Printz Award list with that title. In 2003, Postcards from No Man’s Land by Aidan Chambers won. The note said that the thief would send a postcard! If the thief thought that Postcards from No Man’s Land should not have won, what did he think should have won? You look at the Honor Books from 2003 and find that, although it didn’t win, The House of the Scorpion by Nancy Farmer was given something like an honorable mention. You’ve heard of The House of the Scorpion before. It’s been sitting on Ms. Kinsey’s desk for the last several weeks. She must really like the book.

And then it hits you. Who in the library is best able to hide a library book? Who is the most likely person in the library to know what books have won honors and have an opinion on who should have won? Who in the library could have gotten away with this crime?

None other than Ms. Kinsey herself.

When she is brought in for questioning, Ms. Kinsey freely admits that she did it. She hates seeing books lost and unavailable for students to read so much that she was about to return the book on her own.

Ms. Kinsey apologizes for creating so much trouble saying, “I really thought that The House of the Scorpion should have won that year. I just wanted people to know it existed. I’m glad you figured it out. Now you know more about the library and I get to return the book.”

“At no time is it acceptable to commit crime,” you say after Ms. Kinsey finishes her confession. “Rather than stealing the Printz award book that the LTC did have, the LTC could have both titles in its collection.”

Ms. Kinsey seems stunned by so simple a concept.

“Carry both titles?” she whispers. “Brilliant.”

And that’s just what she did from then on . . . after returning the book of course.

The End

Or is it? You begin to wonder how so many helpful people randomly showed up when you needed advice in the library. And why did they keep leaving books behind? Maybe you had better start investigating . . .

Bibliographical information on the books used in this story is available on The Case of the Frantic Librarian website and at http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/printzaward/previouswinners/2003michaell.htm