

Submission for the SPSSI Teaching Resources Award

1. Description of the activity, assignment, or exercise
 - a. I teach forensic psychology – the assessment and treatment of people who interact with the legal system (“forensic” comes from the Latin word for “court,” and “forensic psychologists” help courts make decisions about people when some question of mental state is involved). I teach this course at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and both in-person and online at Arizona State University. I developed this enrichment activity for the course, and have used it for both the in-person and online versions of the undergraduate course to date, in both small courses (i.e., 30 students) and larger courses (i.e., 60 students) - which demonstrates that the activity is scalable for use in a variety of settings. The assignment is an enrichment activity – students can opt-in to participating (and about 25% of the class has opted-in each time). The honors college here at ASU requests that professors offer enrichment contract opportunities for honors students, and this is what I developed. However, I also open up the enrichment opportunity for all of the students in the course, and several non-honors students opt in every time.
 - b. The activity itself involves a substantial commitment from the students who opt-in. Students join a reading group that meets routinely throughout the semester, and they read at least 3 pieces of literature in the group (two short stories that I picked, and they as a group vote on one of a choice of novels from a list I curated). The group meets weekly or biweekly outside of class. They are asked to generate discussion questions that focus on the psychological study of the social issues involved (i.e., in forensic psychology in this case) for each meeting, which typically lasts 1 to 1.5 hours. Each member of the reading group finishes the activity by writing a 4-5 page paper about forensic psychology in the books. I spend a significant portion of time involved in the groups with the students, and reading/providing feedback and thoughts about their papers to stretch their learning about the psychological issues involved.
2. The purpose of the resource (e.g., foster critical thinking, enhance presentation skills, improve writing)
 - a. The purposes of this resource are to engage students deeply in the course material, and to foster critical thinking skills. Another purpose of the resource is to help students connect to one another (and to me) about the course material. Students really enjoy and appreciate the opportunity to discuss and study the psychology of the social issues involved in forensic psychology in these works of literature. The literature gives them a vehicle to think about and read about these issues, and our discussions highlight the psychological issues involved when people interact with the legal system.
3. The resource itself (e.g., in-class teaching exercise, paper/project assignment, online assignment or exercise, service learning component of course, activities involving the integration of technology in the classroom, such as use of iPads)
 - a. Please see the next page for the resource itself.

Enrichment Activity for Forensic Psychology
Tess M.S. Neal, PhD, Arizona State University

From syllabus: “Students taking this course for honors enrichment will participate in a “*Forensic Psychology in Literature*” reading group that will meet for one hour every other week over the course of the semester. The group will choose which book(s) to read from a list developed by Dr. Neal of literature reflecting forensic psychology issues. Each member of the honors reading group will be expected to develop questions prior to each meeting based on the reading for that segment (such as 1-2 chapter of the novel) and then pose questions to the group and participate in discussion when other group members pose their questions. Dr. Neal will participate in this reading group and will be present for every other meeting. At the end of the book / reading group, each honors student will write a 4-5 page paper about forensic psychology in the book(s).”

Readings:

- 1) “The Tell-Tale Heart” short story by Edgar Allan Poe
- 2) “A Rose for Emily” short story by William Faulkner

And choice of:

- 3) *The Stranger* by Albert Camus (and, ideally *The Book of Evidence* by John Banville)
- 4) *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- 5) *The Alienist* by Caleb Carr

I suggest we start with two classic short stories rich in aspects of both psychology and law, both of which have relevance to forensic psychology. The first is by Poe, where we will examine how obsession (and potentially mental illness) lead to murder. We will consider the workings of the murderer’s mind as he considers his behaviors – a character who may or may not have been “legally insane.” The second is by Faulkner, a story about an eccentric old woman who apparently committed a heinous crime in her youth – a crime that bizarrely pervaded the rest of her life.

After reading and thinking about and discussing these short stories, we will turn to a novel (or perhaps two, depending on what you’d like to do). *The Stranger* and *Crime and Punishment* are critically-acclaimed classic works of literature that are both rich in psychology-law issues and each highlight issues relevant to forensic psychology. If we choose *The Stranger* (a short but extremely well-written and creatively dense book), I suggest we follow that up with *The Book of Evidence*, a newer novel that won several literary awards in the late 1980s. Banville was deeply inspired by *The Stranger*, and Camus-like themes pervade Banville’s *Book of Evidence*. Camus’ character committed murder because “the sun was in [his] eyes,” and Banville’s murdered “because he could.” We will analyze how and why their characters received the sentences they did.

Crime and Punishment is a famous novel, for good reason. If we pick this book, we will consider why the protagonist “decided” to commit a crime, and why he chose the crime he chose. We will consider how events in the authors’ own life – including being sentenced to death and nearly executed – influenced this novel.

The final choice is the least “literary” but perhaps the most relevant to “forensic psychology.” It is an intelligent, well-written, and entertaining historical thriller. It is set at the time when criminology and psychology were both emerging as disciplines – the late 1800s. The author brilliantly wrote real historical characters in the history of forensic psychology into this work of fiction...it’s a great read!