

# Planning a Murder Mystery Program: A Narrative Guide

**By: Elizabeth Boutilier**

In October 2013, our school library hosted a 80s Prom themed Murder Mystery event for young adults.

Feel free to use this narrative as a model for hosting your own Murder Mystery event!

## Setting the Scene

Upon arrival, attendees were escorted to the library's program room. After we gave sufficient time for mingling, the room plunged into darkness.

What followed next was part of our **loose script** for the evening. Three sounds were heard: the shattering of glass, a large thud, and a piercing screech. The lights returned, revealing the principal lying face down in the middle of the floor. A shattered glass sitting in a pool of green liquid by his hand were the only clues. Mr. Green, the "Gym Teacher", was on the scene immediately. He ordered the doors to be locked, and insisted that no one leave the room, as they were all suspects in the principal's murder. He then roped

off the area surrounding the principal's body and urged students to come forward if they had any information.

The **rules** were simple. Approach the gym teacher and tell him **who** committed the murder, **how** they did so, and **why**.

From there, the game was afoot. Because this was our first time hosting such an event, we decided to assign acting roles to staff members only, allowing our young adults to assume the role of detective.

## Characters

Including the principal, there were seven main characters involved in the plot.

**Principal Boddy:** Stuffy and strict, Principal Boddy is by far the least popular person at Prom. But what could he have done to drive someone to murder?

**Mr. Green, the Gym Teacher:** Loves being a teacher, but hates teaching gym. Music is his true passion. Too bad Mr. Boddy's budget cuts put an end to the school's music program...

**Matt Mustard, the Jock:**

Colonel...err...*Captain* of the basketball team. Talented on the court, but struggling in the classroom. Unless Mr. Boddy lets him graduate, he can kiss that athletic scholarship goodbye...

**Rose Scarlet, the Prom Queen:**

Matt Mustard's beautiful girlfriend. She's looking forward to remaining at the top of the food chain when she and Matt attend college together in the fall. But she knows how it feels to be at the bottom too...

**Peter Plum:** Class clown. Secretly in love with Rose Scarlet. He's desperate to impress her by pulling off a major senior prank. Unfortunately, Mr. Boddy had been breathing down his neck the whole night...

**Patty Peacock, School News Reporter:**

Loves a good story. The juicier, the better. Sadly, Mr. Boddy shut down the school paper after she ran a scandalous exposé about him and Cookie the cafeteria lady...

**Cookie the Cafeteria Lady:**

Equally as passionate for Mr. Boddy as she is for cooking. Alas, their flame burned out when Mr. Boddy refused to give up his

position as principal to run away with her. Could Cookie's passion have driven her to do the unthinkable?

**Plot Points**

The seven key characters needed to convey several **key plot points** to the young adults.

1. Rose Scarlet was a band geek before she started dating Matt Mustard and became popular. She was teased relentlessly, and is therefore deeply insecure about her past.
2. Cookie the Cafeteria Lady has noticed that several jars of industrial cleaning supplies are missing from the school kitchen's closet.
3. Peter Plum was serving detention in the school kitchen last week after pulling a prank on Mr. Green, the Gym Teacher.
4. Rose Scarlet is on the prom planning committee. She was serving drinks when the lights went dark.
5. Patty Peacock spotted Rose Scarlet and Peter Plum "canoodling" last week near the school kitchen.
6. In order for Peter Plum to pull off his senior prank, he created a distraction (i.e. switching the lights off).

The staff/actors casually conveyed these plot points while mingling with the young adults. The idea was to provide enough pieces for them to solve the puzzle:

**Who:** Rose Scarlet murdered Principal Boddy.

**How:** Knowing of Peter Plum's feelings for her, she seduced him into stealing Cookie's industrial cleaning supplies. Peter, being hopelessly in love with Rose Scarlet, didn't ask any questions. This was when Patty Peacock caught them together near the kitchen. Rose then prepared a "special" concoction for Mr. Boddy, and served it to him during her shift at the drinks table (part of her Prom Committee duties).

**Why:** Rose Scarlet feels that without Matt Mustard, she'd never be popular in college. She needs him to graduate, and take his scholarship so she can continue her perpetual reign as Prom Queen. Her fear of becoming an outcast again is so deep, she was driven to murder the man threatening her plan.

## Helpful Tips

### Don't give away all the plot points.

- Give the young adults a chance to figure it out for themselves. It's more fun when they are the ones asking questions, as opposed to the actors randomly spouting off plot points.

### Commit to the characters.

- Our actors were in full costume, and never broke character. Rose Scarlet even supplied an awkward school photo from her band days that Patty Peacock flashed to attendees.
- All of the actors conveyed their personal motive for wanting Mr. Boddy dead. This added to the suspense, and kept the true murderer from being revealed too quickly.

### Prepare for a dramatic reveal.

- We asked two of our regular young adults to come dressed as security guards. When the murder was solved, they were instructed to seize the guilty person, and haul them from the room.

- Also, prepare to be falsely accused. A number of students accused Matt Mustard and Peter Plum on several separate occasions. Their reactions to being accused were hilarious!

### Awards

- Along with an award for the “Top Detective”, we also had awards for “Best Dressed”, “Best Hair” and “Best Dancer”.

Overall, our Murder Mystery program was a success! The 80s Prom theme and refreshments were fun enough on their own. The young adults especially enjoyed when the lights were killed. It elicited some real screams, meaning we had to wait a few dramatic moments before we could proceed with our loose script. It took roughly an hour for the murder to be properly solved.

