

Crime Scene Investigation for the Classroom

Jana Burch, Dave McGann, and Kevin Simms

Everybody may love Raymond, but it would seem that a majority of folks also love Sherlock Holmes, JAG, NCIS, and myriad of other crime focused shows currently in the television lineup. What is the draw and how can educators harness the excitement and interest surrounding this genre of entertainment? Cue the Flying Monkeys...

Kevin Simms, Dave McGann, and Jana Burch are Flying Monkeys Consulting and attribute their formation to a bit of a fluke...a crime at the University of Connecticut, a couple of master's degrees and a guru of gifted education. The initial idea of teaching crime scene investigation came about six years ago when McGann, a police force veteran specializing in blood evidence, was encouraged by Joseph Renzulli to present the basics of crime scene investigation to teachers at Confratute, the University of Connecticut's summer institute for teachers,. Renzulli had worked with McGann when a crime had taken place on campus. Renzulli saw the potential to engage students with the math, science and critical thinking skills used by law enforcement officers to solve crimes. McGann joined forces with Kevin Simms, a math specialist, and Jana Burch, a curriculum development specialist, (both of whom earned their master's degrees at UConn and were friends of McGann and Renzulli) to create a program that would bring the high interest of his field to the classroom in a meaningful and beneficial way. CSI: Crime Scene Investigation for the Classroom was born.

McGann admits that he was skeptical at first. "I am a cop, not an educator. Jana and Kevin came in and made what I do appropriate for the classroom and valuable for both the teachers and students." Crime scene investigation brings opportunities for the students to apply knowledge learned in class in an exciting and hands-on fashion. The excitement for the class is growing as the number of teachers enrolling in the CSI class is increasing each year.

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation for the Classroom provides teachers with the skills and knowledge they will need to implement forensic science activities in their classrooms. The presenters each bring their expertise to the table. McGann provides the police perspective on how investigators use CSI skills to solve crimes. Simms aids teachers with the math and science background, while Burch helps connect things back to the regular curriculum.

In today's high stake environment, teachers may be reluctant to introduce something new in their classrooms without some support. According to Burch, "Teachers need to feel that the crime scene activities are going to be successful in their classrooms and they need to be confident that CSI supports the learning objectives. This makes it so much easier to justify devoting instruction time to the CSI materials."

Simms and Burch are careful to provide instruction on the 'how to's'. Says Burch, "There is nothing worse than a lesson that falls flat because the teacher doesn't know how to do something or has never done it before. The format of our teacher training is content (police

background, the history, math, and science behind what we are doing), process (how the professionals do it and how teachers can recreate it in their classrooms) and product (actual pieces of evidence investigators would collect or look at).” Educators leave the training confident that they can recreate the activities in their classrooms and how the students will benefit from participating.

After successfully training teachers on the finer points of crime scene investigation, Simms saw a need to expand the group’s offerings and created the consulting firm with a funny name because, above all else, learning should be fun.

“Even though we provide the support teachers need to do this in their classrooms, the desire for organizations to offer CSI for students at summer camps has been overwhelming. We enjoy doing these camps because we get to work with the students directly and try new activities. It is invaluable to be able to say, “This is what students will do when given this task”. We are always learning and developing, because of the demands of these students,” says Simms. “There is always a high interest in the crime scene program whether it is offered at a STEM focused camp, a summer enrichment camp or a teacher conference. Everybody loves CSI!”