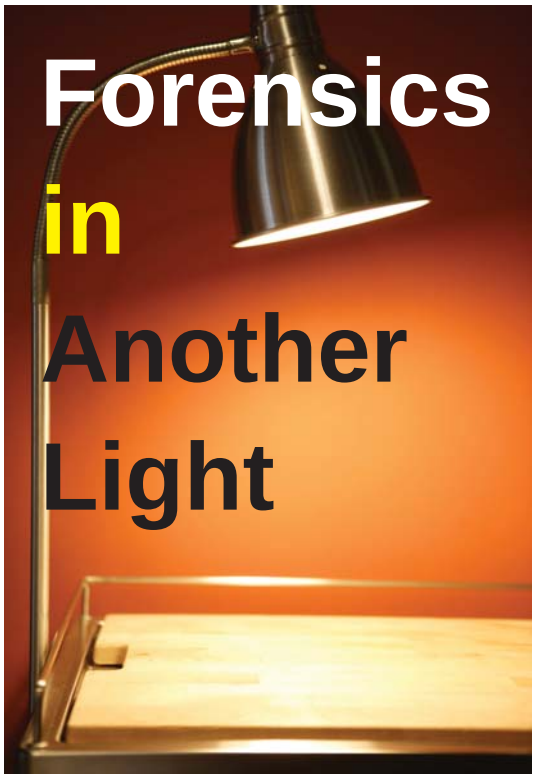

Using Art to Learn Forensics

Processing Crime Scenes Through Dioramas

OR, why should CSI's miniature killer have *all* the fun?

By Brian Bollone

Crime scene analysis is much more than processing, documenting, and collecting evidence. When done correctly, crime scene analysis is a slow, detailed, systematic process that involves standardized procedures and a processing protocol. Trying to teach this multi-step process, however, with 1 to 5 groups of students has an inherent challenge: How can a teacher keep a crime scene's integrity in tact when 30 to 150 students need to process it over the course of two to four days in a public building?

Because crime scene analysis plays a pivotal role in understanding the series of events that surround the commission of a crime, I did not want to ignore this topic of study. However, I did not want to continue having students process a staged crime scene in my classroom because evidence was constantly being compromised due to carelessness or just plain ignorance. This past year, I approached the topic on a smaller scale. A much smaller scale.

In the early 20th century Frances Glessner Lee created 18 dioramas based on actual case files and used them to visually educate and train detectives on how to investigate a crime scene without compromising evidence and how to extrapolate clues from the tiniest details. Many of these works are considered masterpieces and can be viewed on the internet or in the book, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death* by Corinne May Botz (Monacelli Press, $35).

Using the works of Glessner Lee and the advice of my school's art teacher, David Rodgers, I created a new approach for processing

a crime scene. Students were to design and build scale crime scene dioramas which fellow classmates had to process. Normally, students approached at-home projects with a half-hearted enthusiasm, but not so with this. An overwhelming majority of students approached this project with intensity and excitement right from the beginning and amazed me with the level of accuracy in the finished projects. In addition to making the diorama, students needed to include an annotated list of all physical evidence presented in the diorama and a brief summary of the crime scene.

On the day dioramas were turned in, several assessments were completed. First, students completed a self-evaluation based upon the criteria given at the onset of the project (http://www.nvps.net/npsnhs/Curriculum%20Maps/Teacher%20Resources.htm Mystery Writing, Dollhouse Project). After the self-evaluation, students shared their crime scene with a classmate and had him/her analyze and "solve" the crime based on the diorama and the physical evidence list each student completed. Finally, the class voted for "Most Accurate," "Most Creative," and "Unique" diorama and the winning students were presented with certificates of merit. After the students left class, I assessed each diorama and averaged the self-evaluation with the teacher analysis.

In addition to using dioramas for crime scene analysis this past year, a number of students created extra credit dioramas during a mystery story unit. Looking back on this alternative approach to crime scene analysis and the creativity students presented, I can't wait to implement this project next year. ■


Thats
- how
the cookie
crumbles