

Forensics Mixed with Mystery

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When we began to consider this issue of *First Opinions, Second Reactions*, we were thinking of three things. First, mysteries have fascinated young readers as long as we can remember. Why not explore some interesting new titles? Secondly, the study of crimes through the use of scientific discovery and technology has taken crime professionals to new heights, and these feats are often reflected in the books written for young readers. Could we find books that would show us the differences between early procedures and contemporary ones? Finally, we wanted to explore an area in science where women have been depicted as both criminals and scientists (or sleuths).

Women are not strangers to the connections between mystery and forensics. In our June 2011 issue of *First Opinions, Second Reactions*, author Susan Hughes's *Case Closed? Nine Mysteries Unlocked by Modern Science* was considered exemplary by reviewer Mark McClenning because of its information. McClenning found the book interesting for its representation of "real-life journeys of modern archaeologists/researchers and the teams of experts" who worked together and solved "mysteries that have left many researchers bewildered for many years." He was pleased to see that Hughes had shown the contemporary use of "modern technological applications of scientific knowledge" (4). In 2014, we had planned to feature books about women as scientific change agents. In our editorial for the issue, I reported that we had searched for nonfiction "though we would have settled for a fictional story of a woman who used her engineering strategies to solve a problem within society" (4). Sadly, we were unable to find much about contemporary women in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM). Now, with some very unusual new books in our hands, we felt certain we could do better.

In honesty, we would never have thought of this issue's topic if two books had not arrived in our office at about the same time. Anita Yasuda's *Forensics: Cool Women Who Investigate* immediately became a standout in our piles of books because it hit upon something we had tried to cover earlier. As a nonfiction title, it gave us evidence that women were highly skilled scientists. In their review, Anne Dooley and Brenda Capobianco point to this as a reference book. They have affirmed how important this sort of book is for teachers, librarians, and advisors who want to show youngsters that women have been scientists and sleuths, using material from *Forensics: Cool Women Who Investigate* to prove their point: "Yasuda's profile of Chrishow Gabig-Prebyl, a crime scene investigator, gives an authentic account of how a scientist must gather and analyze physical evidence or what is referred to as 'trace evidence' to link a suspect to a victim or a crime scene."

The other nonfiction work, *The Borden Murders*, explored how much has changed in time, both for criminals and detectives. Although Lizzie Borden was the accused murderer of her parents in this true-life mystery, Sarah Miller's presentation led us beyond our interest of women as criminals or as experts in forensics. In fact, the mystery allowed for some sleuthing from its readers. Miller has used the evidence available to provoke an interactive exploration. Relying at first on the data presented in her retelling, both Matt Barker and his eighth grade student Amy went beyond Miller, looking for extra information that might shed light on this historical case. As an adult familiar with Lizzie Borden's place in U.S. popular culture, Matt argued, "We take for granted that there was a trial, and though she was acquitted, she was ultimately found guilty and villainized by public opinion and history." How, he wondered, would Amy look at the events and people involved? As Matt conferred with her, he discovered that Amy acted like a junior sleuth, looking up words and deciphering the characters and events in order to draw her own conclusions about Lizzie Borden's guilt. What did she decide? We'll let you read Matt's review and see for yourself.

As we progressed, we found some of our reviewers inclined to ignore the forensics part of sleuthing. Were we wrong to expect this connection to work? In the end, we hunted for something that could help us defend our combination of forensics and mystery. The Ames Public Library ("If You Like. . .") gave us this: "Forensics is the use of science and technology to investigate and establish facts to be presented in a court of law. This application of scientific knowledge to legal problems can come from a variety of perspectives and specialties such as art, anthropology, archaeology, pathology, geology, psychology, and psychiatry." We weren't off track in our choices of books or topics!

Works Cited

- "If You Like Forensic Mysteries and Thrillers . . ." *Ames Public Library*, June 2011, <http://www.amespubliclibrary.org/readingAdvisory/IfYouLikeForensicMysteriesandThrillers.asp>. Accessed 1 Sept. 2016.
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- McClenning, Mark. "How Science Came to the Aid of Super Sleuths." *First Opinions, Second Reactions*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 2011, 8–10, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/fosr/vol4/iss1/4/>.