FAMILY CASE FILES · BOOK 1

THE MASKED MESSENGER

Teacher & Homeschool Guide

Six detective lessons for ages 10 and up, built on the six cases in the book.

- A lesson plan for every case
- Discussion questions and writing prompts
- Student notes sheet (copy one per student)
- Class tracker
- Where to find every answer in the book

FREE · BY AMIRA FINN

You need one copy of *Family Case Files: The Masked Messenger* (Book 1). This guide may be copied freely for home, classroom and club use. amirafinn.com

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each case becomes one lesson of two 40-minute sessions (three where a case is marked 3 sessions), about 14 sessions in all. Students work in groups of four; one book per group is best.

You need	Details
The book	One copy for the teacher; one per group of four is best.
Copies	The book allows you to photocopy Suspect Boards (pp. 14, 25, 36, 47, 58, 69), Scratch Pads (pp. 16, 27, 38, 49, 60, 71), Detective Academy (pp. 85–90), Detective Exam (pp. 114–115) and Write Your Own Mystery (p. 117), for your own group. Copy every page of this guide freely.
Supplies	Pencils, a ruler marked in inches (Cases 4 and 5), a clock or timer.
Teacher answers	All answers are in the book: Grown-Up Game Guide (p. 94), solutions (pp. 96–107), bonus answers (pp. 108–109), Quick Case answers (pp. 110–111), drill and exam answers (p. 112). (page list on the last page).

Three ways to play. Rookie (ages 10–11): CODE questions and the Suspect Board. Standard: add the Say It Out Loud questions. Master (teens): cover the CODE choices and answer the Master Question on each Scratch Pad.

Group roles (groups of four). Map Reader handles maps and measuring. Timekeeper writes every time and date. Code Breaker fills in the code letters. Note Taker writes the proof. Rotate roles each session.

The lesson rhythm. Session 1: read the case opener aloud (5 min); groups work the first exhibits (25 min); each group shares one fact they are sure of (10 min). **Session 2:** finish the exhibits (20 min); complete the suspect board and code word (10 min); each group accuses with ONE piece of proof while the class tries to knock it down (10 min). Read the solution together only after every group has accused, or open the next session with it. **Session 3 (cases marked 3 sessions):** recap sure facts (5 min), final exhibits (20 min), accusations (10 min), read the solution (5 min).

One rule for every lesson: evidence before opinions. A guess only counts when a student can point to the page that proves it.

Standards links (Common Core): RI.5.1 / RI.6.1 cite text evidence · W.5.1 / W.6.1 argument writing · SL.5.1 / SL.6.1 discussion · 4.MD.A.2 elapsed time · 3.MD.B.4 measuring to halves and quarters of an inch.

Differentiation and extras. Support: the Rookie route, with Level 1/2/3 hint envelopes (pp. 91–93) read aloud. Stretch: the Master route, then students write a mini-case of their own. Early finishers and warm-ups: Quick Cases (pp. 72–84). Assessment: the Detective Exam (pp. 114–115) after the final case.

LESSON PLANS

"During" questions are safe to ask while students work. "After" questions give away the answer: save them for after the solution.

CASE 01 · ROOKIE

The Charter That Vanished

PAGES 6–16 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: ELAPSED TIME, CLOCK OFFSETS, COMPARING MEASUREMENTS

Objective: Students correct a clock that runs slow and test whether an object fits a container, using measurements from the page.

Hook (5 min): Hold up two clocks or phones that disagree. Ask: "Which one tells the truth, and how could you prove it?"

During (safe while solving):

- Which clock in the building can you trust? How do you know?
- What is the difference between a photo showing something is gone and a photo showing who took it?
- Which suspects can you rule out from sizes alone?

After the solution (spoilers):

- The verdict says "moved," not "stolen." Why does that one word matter?
- What did the evidence NOT prove about Rafael?

Writing prompt: Write the incident report Ms. Crane should have written at 2:41 PM, using only facts you can point to on a page.

CASE 02 · ROOKIE

The Museum's Impossible Switch

PAGES 17–27 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: CLOSE OBSERVATION, COMPARING TWO PHOTOS, READING A DOOR LOG TO THE SECOND

Objective: Students compare two images detail by detail and use a timed log to find which door opened.

Hook (5 min): Show two nearly identical pictures. Give 60 seconds to find every change.

During (safe while solving):

- List every difference between Photo A and Photo B. Which could NOT be faked?
- Is the front glass the only way into the case?
- Which entries in the door log happened inside the time window?

After the solution (spoilers):

- The records show what Greta did, not why; her reason comes only from her own words on p. 99. Is it fair to say she tried to take the model?
- Why did the ticket say "replica"?

Writing prompt: You are the museum director. Write three new security rules that would have stopped this switch, with one sentence explaining each.

The Auction with Two Winners

PAGES 28–38 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: ORDERING NUMBERS, SPOTTING A FORGED DOCUMENT, CHECKING AN ALIBI AGAINST A SCHEDULE

Objective: Students put bids in order, list the differences between a real and a fake ticket, and test an alibi against posted times.

Hook (5 min): Show a real receipt. Ask: "If someone made a fake one, what would give it away?"

During (safe while solving):

- Which bid is actually on the bid sheet?
- Name three ways the two tickets differ.
- Does each person's story match the times on the signs?

After the solution (spoilers):

- Theo had a reason people could understand. Does a sympathetic reason change what is fair?
- What would you have done in June's place?

Writing prompt: Write Theo's apology to Hazel, June and Nora: what he did, why it was wrong, and how he will make it right.

CASE 04 · DETECTIVE

The Lighthouse Signal at 8:17

PAGES 39–49 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: LINE OF SIGHT, SCALE AND HEIGHT, DECODING A SHORT/LONG SIGNAL

Objective: Students use a map and a side view to decide where a light really came from, and decode a short/long message.

Hook (5 min): Line up three objects across the room. Have a student look from one spot: which overlap? Move and look again.

During (safe while solving):

- What else sits on Hal's line of sight?
- How can something far away look like it is inside something closer?
- The radio failed at the worst moment. What could cause that?

After the solution (spoilers):

- Hal told the truth about what he saw and was still wrong. How can an honest witness be mistaken?
- Marco caused real danger without meaning to. What should happen next?

Writing prompt: Write the harbor safety announcement for next year's festival, explaining a new rule about the radio room's power.

CASE 05 · SENIOR

The Greenhouse That Nobody Entered

PAGES 50–60 · 3 SESSIONS · SKILLS: MEASURING WITH A RULER (HALVES AND QUARTERS OF AN INCH), CAUSE AND EFFECT, READING A MACHINE LOG

Objective: Students measure true-size openings on p. 55 and use a timeline to show how an object moved with no one touching it.

Hook (5 min): Float a small object in a tray of water and tip it gently. Ask: "Did anyone carry it?"

During (safe while solving):

- Measure every opening on p. 55. Which can the plant pass through?
- Does a muddy suspect prove anything on its own?
- Read the machine log line by line. Which entry looks ordinary but isn't?

After the solution (spoilers):

- "The water did the stealing," but who set the water?
- Why was Mr. Thorne such a convincing suspect, and what cleared him?

Writing prompt: Draw and label a cause-and-effect chain (at least five links) showing how S17 ended up in the basket.

The Forged Ending

PAGES 61–71 · 3 SESSIONS · SKILLS: FACT-CHECKING WORD BY WORD, COMPARING VERSIONS OF A TEXT, MOTIVE VERSUS PROOF

Before you start: Students need their Case Closed ledger (p. 113). If they skipped it, give them the "SAVE FOR CASE 06" lines from pp. 96, 98, 100, 102 and 104.

Objective: Students check a public display against their own records, find every changed word, and separate motive from proof.

Hook (5 min): Show a short headline next to a version with one word changed. Ask: "What changed, and does it matter?"

During (safe while solving):

- Check each claim on the wall against your ledger. How many match exactly?
- Who could have carried the panel in after it was picked up?
- Does having a motive prove someone did it?

After the solution (spoilers):

- Pip hung the fake but did not know it. Is he responsible?
- Where have you seen a true story told with one word changed?

Writing prompt: Rewrite the exhibit wall so every claim is true. Then write two sentences on how a reader can spot a twisted fact online.

DETECTIVE NOTES

Detective name: _____ Case: _____ Date: _____

Exhibit	One fact I am SURE of (with page number)	Code letter
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Code word: ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

Suspect	Why they COULD have done it	Why they COULDN'T (proof + page)

My accusation: _____ did it.

My best proof (page ___):

_____

Something I thought at first that turned out WRONG:

_____

What the evidence does NOT prove:

_____

CLASS TRACKER

Mark ✓ when a group cracks the code word with no hint, or H with a hint. Use the WHO IS M? letters column for the book's running mystery.

Group / student	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	WHO IS M? letters	Quick Cases (of 12)	Exam (of 10)

Ranks: A student's rank is the hardest case they solved with no hints: Cases 1–2 Rookie, 3–4 Detective, 5 Senior, 6 Master. Certificate on p. 119.

WHERE TO FIND THE ANSWERS

Every answer is in the book, with the full reasoning, so this guide points you to the right page instead of repeating it. Each solution page gives the culprit, the code word, the Master answers and "what the evidence does not prove."

Case	Title	Solution in the book
01	The Charter That Vanished	pp. 96–97
02	The Museum's Impossible Switch	pp. 98–99
03	The Auction with Two Winners	pp. 100–101
04	The Lighthouse Signal at 8:17	pp. 102–103
05	The Greenhouse That Nobody Entered	pp. 104–105
06	The Forged Ending	pp. 106–107

Everything else:

- The WHO IS M? letters: bonus answers, pp. 108–109
- M revealed: p. 107
- Quick Case answers: pp. 110–111
- Detective Academy and exam answers: p. 112
- Answers at a glance with "where kids get stuck": Grown-Up Game Guide, p. 94

Tip: read each solution page yourself before the lesson, so you can nudge groups without giving the answer away.

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