FAMILY CASE FILES · BOOK 3

THE BLACK FEATHER

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 Black Feather* (Book 3). 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 13 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 p. 4, the exhibit pages, the scratch pads and the membership card, for home and one classroom (copyright page). Copy every page of this guide freely.
Supplies	Pencils, a ruler (optional, Case 4), a calendar page (Case 5), a clock or timer.
Teacher answers	All answers are in the book: Grown-ups cheat sheet, skills grid and Quick Case list (p. 112), case solutions (pp. 114–125), Quick Case answers (p. 126), exam answers (p. 127). (page list on the last page).

Three ways to play. Rookie (☆, ages 10–11, with a grown-up): the ☆ questions and the culprit. Standard: every exhibit plus "Prove it." Master (teens): Standard plus the Master questions, choices covered.

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 · 4.MD.A.1 / 5.MD.A.1 measurement units · 3.MD.B.3 graphs.

Differentiation and extras. Support: the Rookie route, with the hint page facing each Accuse page read aloud. Stretch: the Master route, then students write a mini-case of their own. Early finishers and warm-ups: Quick Cases (5-minute warm-ups). Assessment: the Detective Exam (pp. 107–108) 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 · LEVEL 1

The Feather in the Archive

STARTS P. 5 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: ELAPSED TIME IN 20-MINUTE STEPS, ONE-OF-A-KIND CLUES, READING A ROUNDS CARD

Objective: Students use a guard's 20-minute rounds to find a missing check and match clues that fit only one place.

Hook (5 min): Ask: "A guard checks a door every 20 minutes from 10:10. List the check times until noon."

During (safe while solving):

- List the guard's check times. Which one is missing?
- Which clue could only come from one door or one place?
- Who was where at the moment of the missing check?

After the solution (spoilers):

- Lyle left the feather because the envelope told him to. Why would the person paying him want a feather left behind?
- Which clue would you have missed without the rounds card?

Writing prompt: Write the archive's new rounds card and explain how it closes the gap.

CASE 02 · LEVEL 1

The Courtroom Seats

STARTS P. 23 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: SEATING CHARTS, LEFT AND RIGHT, POSITION WORDS, LINE OF SIGHT

Objective: Students read a seating chart from different viewpoints and decide who could see the clock and who could leave.

Hook (5 min): Seat four students in a row. Ask the class: "Whose left is it, yours or theirs?"

During (safe while solving):

- Draw the seating chart. Who sat in each seat?
- From each seat, what can you actually see?
- Compare the pocket feather with the archive feather (p. 28). What details are different?

After the solution (spoilers):

- Opal had a reason. Is a reason the same as proof? What made the difference here?
- Why do detectives check viewpoints instead of trusting a single witness?

Writing prompt: Write a witness statement from seat A2, describing only what that seat could see.

CASE 03 · LEVEL 2

The Weighed Parcel

STARTS P. 39 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: BALANCES, OUNCES AND POUNDS, DELIVERY TIMELINES

Objective: Students convert between ounces and pounds and use a change in weight to prove a parcel was opened.

Hook (5 min): Weigh two classroom objects on a kitchen scale (or compare by hand). Ask: "If one is lighter later, what happened?"

During (safe while solving):

- How much should the parcel weigh, and how much does it weigh now?
- When could the parcel have been opened?
- Which suspect is cleared by a live video at the time?

After the solution (spoilers):

- How can a number on a label be stronger proof than a person's word?
- Who should have checked the weight first?

Writing prompt: Write Gus's report to Officer Reyes explaining the weight difference, with the numbers.

CASE 04 · LEVEL 2

The Squashed Graph

STARTS P. 57 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: BAR GRAPHS AND PICTOGRAPHS, A CUT-OFF AXIS, READING DATA HONESTLY

Objective: Students spot a graph whose axis does not start at zero and redraw it fairly.

Hook (5 min): Show two bar graphs of the same numbers, one starting at 0 and one at 190. Ask: "Which looks like a bigger difference?"

During (safe while solving):

- Where does each graph's axis start?
- What is the real difference between the two bars?
- Who could have made the front-page graph, and when was Mavis's computer used?

After the solution (spoilers):

- Graphs can mislead without a single wrong number. Where have you seen this?
- Why does the person who made the graph matter?

Writing prompt: Redraw the graph fairly, then write two sentences telling Gazette readers what it really shows.

CASE 05 · LEVEL 3

The Calendar Code

STARTS P. 73 · 2 SESSIONS · SKILLS: CALENDARS, NTH WEEKDAY, EVERY-OTHER-DAY PATTERNS

Objective: Students use a calendar to find dates from riddles and test an every-other-day rota.

Hook (5 min): Hand out a month calendar. Ask: "What date is the fourth Saturday?"

During (safe while solving):

- Solve the date riddle on the calendar. Which day is it?
- If the spare key stays overnight in the mayor's office every other day from the 15th, which nights is it there?
- Whose initials or handwriting appear on the papers?

After the solution (spoilers):

- Even a mayor can be the culprit. Why should the same rules apply to everyone?
- Which calendar clue cracked the case?

Writing prompt: Write a riddle that leads to a date on this month's calendar, and give the answer on the back.

CASE 06 · FINALE

The Recovered Page

STARTS P. 91 · 3 SESSIONS · SKILLS: ELAPSED TIME, MATCHING TORN PIECES AND HANDWRITING, KEYCARD LOGS, EVERY EARLIER SKILL

Before you start: Students need the strip letters from each case (p. 4) for the shelf word.

Objective: Students combine evidence from all six cases, match torn pieces and use keycard times to identify who used another person's keycard to throw away the 1996 evidence.

Hook (5 min): Tear a sheet of paper in two. Shuffle the halves with other torn sheets. Ask: "How can you tell which halves match?"

During (safe while solving):

- Which torn half completes the note on p. 104?
- How many keycard entries fall inside the window?
- Which keycard entries could belong to someone other than the card's owner?

After the solution (spoilers):

- Dex tore the page but was paid by someone else. Who is more responsible?
- What do the shelf letters spell, and what does the word mean?

Writing prompt: Write the crew's report to the court, listing the three strongest pieces of proof against the culprit.

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 Strip letters (THE SEVEN) column for the book's running mystery.

Group / student	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Strip letters (THE SEVEN)	Quick Cases (of 12)	Exam (of 10)

Ranks: Exam ranks are on p. 127; students record their rank on the Detective License.

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 Feather in the Archive	p. 114
02	The Courtroom Seats	p. 116
03	The Weighed Parcel	p. 118
04	The Squashed Graph	p. 120
05	The Calendar Code	p. 122
06	The Recovered Page	pp. 124–125

Everything else:

- The strip word and THE SEVEN: Case 6 solution, pp. 124–125, and p. 126
- Quick Case answers: p. 126
- Exam answers: p. 127
- Rookie pages and skills: cheat sheet, p. 112

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

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