**The Research Project: Unsolved Mysteries**

**Introduction**

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson often drew different conclusions from the same clues, the same pieces of information. They then looked for additional evidence to prove that something was true.

The process of solving a mystery and the process of writing a research paper have several things in common. Both require gathering and studying clues, evidence, and information; weeding out “red herrings” or irrelevant information; organizing thoughts; and presenting accurate conclusions.

You are a self-employed research writer. You have been hired by the Unsolved Mysteries Society to conduct background research for an upcoming documentary. It is very important for you to provide accurate information because the people at the Unsolved Mysteries Society pride themselves on presenting nothing but facts. Your professional reputation (and your future paychecks!) will be affected by the quality of the report you produce for them.

**The Task and Tools**

The Unsolved Mysteries Society has commissioned a research report analyzing the information about one of the topics on “The List.” Accompanying the report of the facts in the powerpoint or prezi you will create, they want an annotated bibliography in which you summarize your findings from your reputable sources.

The visual presentation will explain what facts are known, what theories have been presented to explain the facts, which theory has the most support, and what aspects of the mystery remain unexplained. The producers will rely on this factual information as they prepare the script of the documentary.

You will require a supply of 3x5 index cards and a flash drive.

**The Process**

The process of conducting and presenting research has several steps. This is a broad outline. Don’t panic! We will take this one step at a time and you will have plenty of help.

1. On your own, explore some of the topics that appeal to you. Google them; check Wikipedia to get some background about them. Decide which ones you really want to work on, deciding on a first, second, and third choice.
2. Sign up for your unsolved mystery – only one person can choose each topic. First come, first served. Choosing will be on February 27.
3. With the little bit of background information from your quick search of the topic, **create a few questions** that you think need to be answered about the mystery. Find facts and theories about the mystery that answer the questions you thought up.
4. Take notes from lots of different sources: books, magazine articles, and the Internet. Keep track of your sources by making bibliography cards. Use the MLA handout to make bibliography cards in the correct format. Keep any notes you take on additional index cards. (As an alternative to the note cards, you could create a bibliography table.)
5. These cards will help you to write your annotated bibliography. On each card, on one side you should have the source name. On the other side, the facts, quotes, or statistics you discovered from this source. When you go to create the annotated bibliography, you will sum up the information from your note cards in an “annotation” about the source you are citing.
6. You should have at least five bibliography cards and fifteen note cards; or you will have at least five sources in the table and fifteen facts or quotes that correspond. We will have three days in the computer lab, but if you do not have all that you need from these three days, then you should make time to go to the Media Center for additional research by the deadline for the cards.
7. Think about what you have learned. Are any of your original questions still unanswered? If the answer is yes, you may need to continue your research. Have you added any additional questions since you began gathering information? Do you have answers for them?
8. Organize the material you have gathered into a useful form. Some people like graphic organizers; some like outlines; some like lists. The important thing is to plan.
9. Take that plan and expand it onto the handout I will give you.
10. Draft your visual presentation. Get your facts and ideas into written form. Be sure to indicate the source of the facts, ideas, and phrases you found during your research, so that you avoid plagiarism. Be sure to include conclusions you have developed yourself based on the research you have conducted.
11. Think some more and revise your presentation. There is more to revision than spelling and grammar, though they are extremely important. You may want to reorganize or move slides around, or you may see where you need more facts for evidence to back up a claim.
12. Present your work to a classmate or trusted individual to see your work through a fresh set of eyes. Don’t show it to a “Yes” person who smiles and says everything is great. You want criticism and feedback, not smiles and nods.
13. Finally, publish and present your work. On the due date, turn in your annotated bibliography to the teacher and present your powerpoint. In this way, your instructor may follow along with your sources and make notes where needed.
14. Celebrate a challenging job well done!

**Important Dates and Requirements**

Topic drawing: Wednesday, February 28

Bibliography and note cards (or the document equivalent) due: Tuesday, March 6

Rough Drafts for teacher review on: March 9

Presentations and Annotated Bibliography due: March 12