



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 9 to 11

**About the Author:** Adapted by MediaSmarts, with permission, from a unit developed by Mark Zamparo, an Ottawa-based media educator.

# Comparing Crime Dramas

## Overview

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This lesson encourages students to analyze the differences between crime shows in Canada, Britain and the United States. Students discuss the general differences between Canadian, British and American television dramas as well as the specific differences between crime dramas from these countries. Groups of students then view, evaluate and compare two crime dramas from different countries and report their findings to the class.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will:

- understand how dramas construct reality
- appreciate the differences between the constructed reality of crime dramas and crime in real life
- appreciate the different approaches to this genre in the United States, Canada and other countries
- understand how the technical aspects of the filming of a crime drama contribute to its overall effect
- understand the plot formulas that underpin crime drama
- understand how crime dramas relate to the drama genre

## Preparation and Materials

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Photocopy:

- Drama Comparison Assignment
- Group Oral Presentation Contract
- For some background on recent Canadian, American and British crime dramas, follow the links below under "Background Information"

## Procedure

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### Guided Discussion

Ask students to brainstorm the titles of American and Canadian and British dramas on television and, together, consider the following:

- Is there a difference between dramas that are produced in the United States and dramas that are produced in Canada or in Britain? (Comparing two similar programs is a good starting point in identifying differences.)



- What are the differences? (Write student suggestions onto the blackboard.)

Regarding crime dramas, ask your students:

- Do the generalizations that have just been listed apply to crime dramas?
- Do you think that crime shows offer an accurate portrayal of law enforcement and crime?
- What are some of the differences that exist between Canadian, British, and American crime dramas?
- What about crime dramas from countries other than these?
- Compared to American crime dramas, why haven't Canadian cop shows had much of a presence on TV?
- What is the 'American Formula' for cop shows?
- What are the traits of a Canadian cop show?
- Do you agree that Canadian cop shows have to be distinctly 'Canadian'?
- Do you think that a distinctly Canadian cop show would appeal to an American audience? Why or why not?

Once students have compiled a list of differences, maintain this list for comparison at the end of the lesson.

## Activity

### Group Assignment

In this assignment, students will evaluate and compare two crime dramas, from different countries.

When comparing crime dramas, students will find that American programs far outnumber Canadian programs. Students might include British crime dramas, which appear on channels such as PBS, TVOntario, Bravo and Showcase in their comparisons. Often, American stations will adapt British programs for American audiences; for example, the British crime show “Cracker” was adapted by ABC. One group might find it interesting to compare the British and American versions of this program.

- Divide your class into four groups. Each group will select two dramas to analyze — one from Canada or Great Britain, and one from the United States.
- Once this is done, the group will complete, and submit, the Group Oral Presentation Contract.
- Review terms and assignment criteria with class.
- Group members will complete their assignment sheets and prepare an oral report of their findings to present to class.

Note: in order to facilitate in-depth study, the programs that are viewed might also be taped. If there are facilities available, groups might use class time to review portions of their tapes as they prepare for their presentations. When all presentations have been completed, students should state two or three generalizations about the programs produced in these three countries and compare these generalizations to their original list.

## Evaluation

The teacher and students will evaluate the group oral presentations.



## Background Information

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### General Background on Cop Shows

- TV Tropes: Cop Show <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/CopShow>
- TV Tropes: Police Procedural <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/PoliceProcedural>
- TV Tropes: Forensic Drama <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ForensicDrama>

### Web Pages About Crime Dramas

#### Canadian:

- King [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King\\_%282011\\_TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_%282011_TV_series%29)
- Durham County [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durham\\_County\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durham_County_%28TV_series%29)
- The Border [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Border\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Border_%28TV_series%29)
- Murdoch Mysteries [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murdoch\\_Mysteries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murdoch_Mysteries)
- Rookie Blue [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rookie\\_Blue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rookie_Blue)

#### American:

- CSI: Crime Scene Investigation [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:\\_Crime\\_Scene\\_Investigation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSI:_Crime_Scene_Investigation)
- Castle [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_%28TV_series%29)
- Hawaii Five-O [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaii\\_Five-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawaii_Five-0)
- Bones [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bones\\_TV\\_Series](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bones_TV_Series)
- Person of Interest [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Person\\_of\\_Interest\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Person_of_Interest_%28TV_series%29)

#### British:

- Wallander [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wallander\\_%28UK\\_TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wallander_%28UK_TV_series%29)
- Luther [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther_%28TV_series%29)
- Waking the Dead [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waking\\_the\\_Dead\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waking_the_Dead_%28TV_series%29)
- The Innocence Project [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Innocence\\_Project](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Innocence_Project)
- Sherlock [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_%28TV_series%29)

Note: These pages are created by users and not edited, so there may be some inappropriate language. Be sure to check each one before using it in class.

## Drama Comparison Assignment

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When comparing the crime dramas that your group has chosen, be sure to include similarities and differences, under the following headings.

- plot structure, typical patterns or twists, the relationship between plot structure and placement of commercials
- treatment of themes: realistic, farcical, superficial, complex, sensitive.
- technical aspects — camera work, lighting, special effects, stunt work.
- editing — what is the pace of the action within the show?
- sound — sound effects, music, silence.
- sets, costumes, props (cars)
- values — what values were imbedded in the shows? Did the commercials reflect these values?
- advertisements — list the advertisers; identify the target audience; describe and analyze the ad's appeal (visual, auditory, humorous).
- characters — describe the major characters; identify stereotypes (social, cultural, racial, gender-related).
- mass appeal techniques — jolts per minute, choice of characters, choice of actors, issues, events, music.
- time slot — time (prime time?) and day of shows, program competition, programs on before and after, the rating of shows from Neilson, Television Trends, or the daily newspaper (ratings are published four times a year).



## Group Contract: Oral Presentation

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**Names of group members:**

**Crime drama title:**

**Audio-visual aids needed for presentation:**

**Date of presentation:**

**Signature of members of group:**

**Teacher's signature:**

