

Enrichment Activity for Forensic Psychology
Dr. Neal, Spring 2016

From syllabus: "Students taking this course for honors enrichment will participate in a "*Forensic Psychology in Literature*" reading group that will meet for one hour every other week over the course of the semester. The group will choose which book(s) to read from a list developed by Dr. Neal of literature reflecting forensic psychology issues. Each member of the honors reading group will be expected to develop questions prior to each meeting based on the reading for that segment (such as 1-2 chapter of the novel) and then pose questions to the group and participate in discussion when other group members pose their questions. Dr. Neal will participate in this reading group and will be present for every other meeting. At the end of the book / reading group, each honors student will write a 4-5 page paper about forensic psychology in the book(s)."

Readings:

- 1) "The Tell-Tale Heart" short story by Edgar Allan Poe
- 2) "A Rose for Emily" short story by William Faulkner

And choice of:

- 3) *The Stranger* by Albert Camus (and, ideally *The Book of Evidence* by John Banville)
- 4) *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- 5) *The Alienist* by Caleb Carr

I suggest we start with two classic short stories rich in aspects of both psychology and law, both of which have relevance to forensic psychology. The first is by Poe, where we will examine how obsession (and potentially mental illness) lead to murder. We will consider the workings of the murderer's mind as he considers his behaviors – a character who may or may not have been "legally insane." The second is by Faulkner, a story about an eccentric old woman who apparently committed a heinous crime in her youth – a crime that bizarrely pervaded the rest of her life.

After reading and thinking about and discussing these short stories, we will turn to a novel (or perhaps two, depending on what you'd like to do). *The Stranger* and *Crime and Punishment* are critically-acclaimed classic works of literature that are both rich in psychology-law issues and each highlight issues relevant to forensic psychology. If we choose *The Stranger* (a short but extremely well-written and creatively dense book), I suggest we follow that up with *The Book of Evidence*, a newer novel that won several literary awards in the late 1980s. Banville was deeply inspired by *The Stranger*, and Camus-like themes pervade Banville's *Book of Evidence*. Camus' character committed murder because "the sun was in [his] eyes," and Banville's murdered "because he could." We will analyze how and why their characters received the sentences they did.

Crime and Punishment is a famous novel, for good reason. If we pick this book, we will consider why the protagonist "decided" to commit a crime, and why he chose the crime he chose. We will consider how events in the authors' own life – including being sentenced to death and nearly executed – influenced this novel.

The final choice is the least "literary" but perhaps the most relevant to "forensic psychology." It is an intelligent, well-written, and entertaining historical thriller. It is set at the time when criminology and psychology were both emerging as disciplines – the late 1800s. The author brilliantly wrote real historical characters in the history of forensic psychology into this work of fiction...it's a great read!