

Cracking History's Cold Cases: A Research Project

The Task: Create a Case File

History is filled with unsolved mysteries. Your task in this research project is to choose one of those mysteries and present a plausible theory to explain it. You will research a variety of primary and secondary sources to uncover possible theories and the clues that support them. After you conclude your research, you will create a "Case File" that includes: background on the mystery, the most plausible theory, and a collection of annotated evidence that backs up that theory.

Steps

1. Choose your Cold Case (circle one)

The Great Chicago Fire

The Disappearance of Amelia Earhart

The Lost Colony of Roanoke

The Disappearance of Glenn Miller

2. Turn your Cold Case into a question: What do you want to know?

3. Visit the "Research Links" page on the History Detectives Website to start your research. After looking through a few of the secondary sources, write down at least two competing theories of your cold case below. (You may choose to return to this step and add more theories if you turn up something compelling later in your research).

Theory 1	
Theory 2	
Theory 3	
Theory 4	

4. Use the "Your Investigation, One Clue at a Time" graphic organizers to take notes. Your research should include a mix of primary and secondary sources. Remember, these historical events are mysteries for a reason: the sources will present you with

contradictions. Take note of discrepancies and base your conclusions on what you consider to be the most credible sources.

5. Review the evidence you have collected and answer the following questions:

a. What theory is most plausible?

b. What evidence can you present to support this theory? (Be sure your evidence includes primary sources as well as secondary ones.)

c. Explain one alternate theory and provide reasons—based in evidence!—as to why you discarded that theory.

d. What did you learn about this historical period from your investigation? Why is an investigation such as this an important undertaking?

6. Using the notes from the graphic organizers and this handout, prepare a “case file.” You may choose to create a poster, an essay, or a presentation. No matter your format, be sure your case file includes the following elements:

- Background on the Historical Event
- The Most Plausible Theory
- At least three pieces of evidence that support that theory
- An explanation of each piece of evidence you present
- Explanation of one alternate theory and your reasons for discarding it
- So what? Why was this investigation a worthwhile endeavor?