**Investigative Literature**

**Grade level range:** 9-12

**Length of lesson:** One-two weeks

**Overview of lesson:** This is a research project that can be used as a post-reading assessment after any text to further investigate the context of the story. After reading a major text, students will use inquiry-based research to further investigate a text. Using technology, students will analyze investigative questions, conduct their own research, and present their research to the class.

**Essential learning outcomes questions:** By the end of this lesson, students will be able to analyze investigative questioning and think about their own reasoning, research using an inquiry-based method, and use new technology to compose and present their research findings.

**Common Core Standards:**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7  
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8  
Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

**Materials Needed:** Library and internet access to technology presentation tools (at least padlet.com).

**How the Lesson Will Flow:**

1. Day 1: After finishing reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, set up a class Padlet by signing up on padlet.com. This page is for students to post investigative questions about the novel. It can be cultural questions of the time period (“Was Tom Robinson’s trial based on a real event?”), literary questions (“Why did Harper Lee break up her novel into two parts?”), expository questions (“What did Harper Lee mean when she said…?”), etc., as long as they tie in to the culture or themes of the novel. Encourage them to ask broad, thought-provoking questions (the questions shouldn’t have a one-word or a yes/no answer! Perhaps starting sentences with words like “how” or “why” will help them to construct good questions). Remind them to put their name with their question.

Begin in class by posting example questions to the Padlet page, modeling how to post to Padlet as well as types of questions to ask. Assign students to post at least three different questions to the Padlet for the next class for homework the next day.

Day 2: In class, project the questions on the screen using a laptop. Discuss the questions with the students—which are the best? Which need to be worded more clearly? How can we revise some of the weaker questions in order to improve clarity/focus, etc.? You can have an in-class discussion, or you can use anonymous seminar websites such as gosoapbox.com, pinterest.com, or corkboard.com to have students discuss the questions online. Discussion should be 15-30 minutes long; you may go through each question or you may preview the questions before and pick just a few to discuss.

1. Day 2: Have students choose one of the questions discussed for their own focus on a research investigation. If the students choose the same/similar questions, let them know that it’s okay—their research will lead them to different places, and it will make for interesting presentations. If you have time, you can pre-conference with each student about their question and anticipated following questions to 1) make sure their question will build critical thinking skills, and 2) help to begin to guide them in their inquiry. Have them begin thinking about which question for 5 minutes in the end of class, and commit to a question by the next class as a homework assignment.
2. Days 3-5: As you read the inquiry questions they turned in for homework, allow the students to begin their research. Instruct the students that the main purpose of this assignment is to answer their question as thoroughly as they can. This will inevitably lead to further questions. You can have them use as many or few sources that you think is necessary for the assignment, but I recommend minimum of 3 sources (you can limit to just textbooks, or only online sources, or a mixture of both, and you may even provide some sample valid sources. If your school has access to a database, instruct students on how to use the database by searching key words and scanning articles). You can allow the students time in class to begin their research, and assign the research completion for homework. Students should take about 3 days (in class and at home) to research their question. Their questions, however, must stay WITHIN the topic they originally chose. For example, if the student’s question focused on the symbolism of the mockingbird, then they cannot end their investigation with a discussion on different birds of North Carolina. Their research may take them into different literary devices of the novel, different symbols in the novel, or even different meanings of the mockingbird within the novel, etc. If they do stray far from the topic, it’s okay—that’s good for the student to learn. But to keep them on track, let them know that each resource must provide another piece of their answer to their question—that way they’ve at least begun from a similar place each time they find a new source, and can talk somewhat knowledgeably about their topic.
3. Days 3-5: As they research, tell the students to keep track of their own thinking and questioning. As they answer a question, what other questions arise? Do they follow these questions in order to gain further understanding and context, or try to continue to answer their main question? What do they think about? What other connections do they make? Did they have to start over and pick a new question, or was their question going to take MUCH more research to answer? Etc.
4. Day 6: Have the students begin crafting their presentation during class. Their presentation should contain enough information for a 2-3 minute presentation on their inquiry. They can use as many questions and information as they see fit, but their conclusion should contain a reflection on the research process: How did they feel about this project? What it easy or difficult? Did they feel like it was “real world,” or a waste of time? Did they find the research interesting/valuable? What was positive about it, and what was frustrating? Etc. For their presentation, allow them to choose the medium in which to present their projects: make a Prezi, create a YouTube video, make a collage through pixlr using the Creative Commons photos and text, etc. Encourage them to try a new technology tool.
5. Day 7: Before the students present, have them write their conclusion as a reflection in paragraph form. This is to practice articulating their writing and make them accountable for having their presentation done on time. Due that day—give students 15-20 minutes to write.
6. Day 7: Have the students present their research to the class. Make sure they listen to each other’s presentations—you can give each student a Plus/Delta sheet to fill out and give to the presenter as soon as they’re done for immediate peer feedback. Let them know they will be writing about their peer’s research in an informal essay.
7. Day 7: Once done with all the presentations, have the students write an informal essay addressing how their research was similar/different to their peers (for example: Two students begin with different questions, but their findings overlap at one point; two students start with different questions and have different final answers, etc.).

**Assessment:**

1. Presentation: The presentation should be between 2-3 minutes long, and should include all of their questions and details they have thought about in the search for the answer to their question. The conclusion should be a reflection on the research process. Must include cited sources as well (at least 3) as well as a focus on the topic to attempt to fully answer an inquiry question.
2. Informal essay: Should be two-three paragraph (8-10 sentences) and contain specific details comparing their research to their peers’. Should compare with at least two other students. Can be details that were similar, details that differed from similar research, or just a reflection on someone else’s research—what did their peer’s research make them think about?
3. Journal entry: Should be one paragraph (8-10 sentences) and contain a reflection about their experience of the process of inquiry-based research.

**Sources for the Lesson:**

Based on the chapter we read about inquiry-based research rather than thesis-based research, I came up with this lesson plan.