

The Penultimate Peril

Library Lessons

by | Lynne Farrell Stover

“The entire 100 section of a library is dedicated to philosophy and psychology, and so is the first story of our hotel, from the reception desk, which is labeled 101 for the theory of philosophy, to the concierge desk, which is labeled 175 for the ethics of recreation and leisure, to the couches over there, which are labeled 135, for dreams and mysteries, in case our guests want to take a nap or conceal something underneath the sofa cushions.”

-Frank or Ernest explaining the organization of Hotel Denouement to the Baudelaire siblings

Story Synopsis

Things continue to go awry for the three Baudelaire orphans in book twelve of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Upon picking the children up in a taxi at the Briny Beach, an emotional Kit Snicket drives them to the enigmatic Hotel Denouement. There she leaves them disguised as concierges with instructions to station themselves in the hotel and spy on the guests to try to determine who is friend and who is foe. They are also to prepare for a V.F.D. meeting that is to be held at the hotel on Thursday. While serving as *flaneurs*, or people who quietly observe their surroundings, the children soon discover the unusual organization of the hotel. The building is cataloged based on the Dewey Decimal System. (For example, if you were to venture into room 831 you would find a gathering of German poets.) The book serves as a review for the eleven that came before it and a set up of the next one, the last scheduled for the series.

Note: While most students will be familiar with the popular *A Series of Unfortunate Events* books, it is not necessary for the students to have read the featured title to successfully complete these lessons. The activities may be used as class instruction to individual students, cooperative learning groups or as part of a learning center.

Lesson I: The Dewey Decimal System at the Hotel Denouement

The Hotel Denouement (*denouement* meaning conclusion, finale, the end) may be full of dangerous and bizarre people, but it is very

well organized. One of the hotel's owners, either Frank or Ernest Denouement, explains it to the Baudelaire siblings. “The second story is the 200s for religion, and we have a church, a cathedral, a chapel, a synagogue, a mosque, a temple, a shrine, a shuffleboard court and Room 296, which is currently occupied by a somewhat cranky rabbi.” He continues to describe the hotel, which follows the Dewey Decimal System in its floor plan, telling the children, “You'll probably walk through every section of the hotel, from the astronomy observatory in Room 999 to the employees' quarters in the basement, Room 000.”

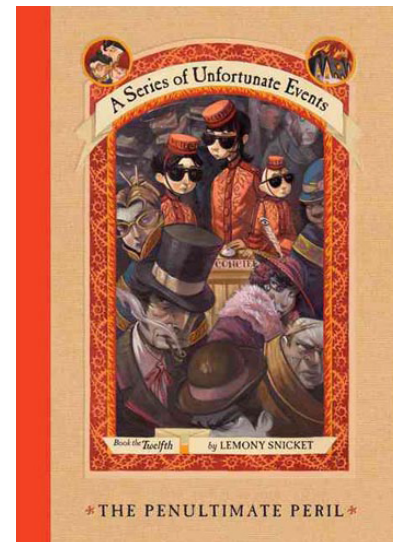
Time Required: 25–30 minutes

Objectives:

- The students will review the Dewey Decimal Classification System.
- The students will participate in a creative problem solving activity using the Dewey Decimal System's classification structure as an organizational tool.

Materials:

- The Dewey Decimal Classification System visual (page 4)
- What's the New Dewey Decimal Number? activity (page 5)
- writing tools



- copy of *The Penultimate Peril* by Lemony Snicket (*optional*)

Directions:

1. Prior to class, make a transparency of the visual and enough photocopies for your students.
2. Inform the students that this lesson will concern the Dewey Decimal System, which is the method used to organize materials in most school libraries. (If possible, read pages 62–64 in *The Penultimate Peril* by Lemony Snicket which describes how the Hotel Denouement is organized using the Dewey Decimal System.)
3. Display and review the visual. Point out where these groups are located in your library.
4. Pass out the activity sheet. Students may work individually or in groups. Check as a group when students have completed the task. *Possible Answers:* 1. 200s, 2. 500s, 3. 000s, 4. 300s, 5. 100s, 6. 600s, 7. 100s, 8. 600s, 9. 700s, 10. 900s, 11. 800s, 12. 400s. (However, accept all logical responses as the books described do not actually exist!)
5. More information concerning the Dewey Decimal System and Melvil Dewey can be found at these Web sites:
www.tnrplib.bc.ca/dewey.html
www.mtsu.edu/~vvesper/dewey.html
library.gallaudet.edu/lr/dewey.html
www.booktalking.net/books/dewey

Lesson II: Author's Alliteration Alert

Author Lemony Snicket loves to play with words. A Series of Unfortunate Events is full of acronyms, palindromes and secret codes. The titles themselves, always following the same alliterative pattern, often have double meanings. Students can have fun learning literary terms while trying to predict the title of the next book.

Time Required: 20–25 minutes

Objectives:

- The students will be introduced to the literary term alliteration.
- The students will participate in a class discussion and activity dealing with book titles.

Materials:

- Author's Alliteration Alert! visual (page 6)
- transparency marker
- copies of Lemony Snicket's books (*optional*)

Directions:

1. Make a transparency of the visual prior to class.
2. Display the visual and discuss it with students.
3. Solicit possible titles from students and record them on the visual. (It may be interesting to record the titles to check to see if any are close to Mr. Snicket's choice for book thirteen.)

Lesson III: Lemony's Library Lesson—Dewey Decimal Shelf Search

Students learn best by doing! Get them out of their seats and into the shelves with the Dewey Decimal Shelf Search.

Time Required: 30–40 minutes

Objectives:

- The students will review the Dewey Decimal System and the literary term alliteration.
- The students will discover the location in the library of specific groups of books.

Materials:

- Dewey Decimal Shelf Search activity (page 7)
- writing tools

Directions:

1. Prior to class, make a transparency of page 7 and enough photocopies for your students.
2. Tell the students that Klaus Baudelaire, a character in Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events, is always looking for a book on the library shelf to help him solve a

Library Lessons

problem. This lesson will be very similar to what Klaus tries to do.

3. Display the transparency and discuss the content with the students.
4. Give each student or group a copy of the activity. Explain your expectations for this activity to the students.
For example: Put books back on the shelves, respect others, use time wisely, etc.
5. Inform the students that they may not be able to complete the chart; however their score will reveal how hard they worked.
6. At the end of the allocated time, have students return to their seats, calculate their scores and share their “discoveries.”
7. Allow students to check out the interesting books they discovered on the shelves during this activity!

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McREL Standards

Language Arts

- **Writing**
Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Gathers and uses information for research purposes
- **Reading**
Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process
- **Listening and Speaking**
Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Information Power

Standard 1: Indicators 4 and 5

Standard 5: Indicators 1, 2 and 3

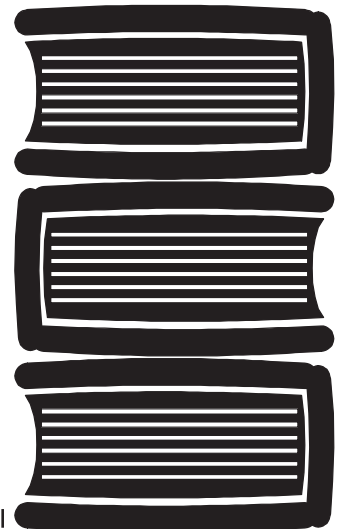
K–8 national standards determined by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, www.mcrel.org). Standards © McREL, 2004.

The Dewey Decimal Classification System

An American named Melvil Dewey devised the Dewey Decimal System in the late 1800s. This numerical system organizes the books in the library into ten categories of knowledge.




- **000s—General Works** [*Encyclopedias, Reference Books*]
- **100s—Philosophy** [*Philosophy, Psychology, Paranormal Phenomena*]
- **200s—Religion** [*Church History, Mythology, All Religions*]
- **300s—Social Sciences** [*Manners, Law, Folklore*]
- **400s—Language** [*Dictionaries, Foreign Languages*]
- **500s—Natural Science** [*Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology*]
- **600s—Technology & Applied Science** [*Inventions, Health*]
- **700s—Fine Arts** [*Art, Music, Crafts, Sports, Hobbies*]
- **800s—Literature** [*Poetry, Plays, Short Stories*]
- **900s—History** [*Geography, Biography, Travel*]

Note: Books of fiction could be cataloged using the Dewey Decimal number 813. However, because there are usually so many of these books, most libraries have a section just for the fiction books, which are organized alphabetically by the authors' last name.



What's the New Dewey Decimal Number?

Lemony Snicket has written many books about the miserable lives of the poor Baudelaire children, all of them fiction. What if these titles were not fiction? What Dewey Decimal number would you assign them so they could be easily located on the library's shelves? Using the chart below and the make-believe descriptions, decide what new category each title could be placed under. Be prepared to defend your choices.

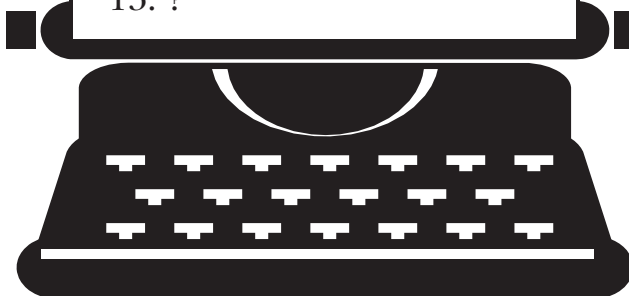
	000s—General Works [<i>Encyclopedias, Reference Books</i>]
	100s—Philosophy [<i>Philosophy, Psychology, Paranormal Phenomena</i>]
	200s—Religion [<i>Church History, Mythology, All Religions</i>]
	300s—Social Sciences [<i>Manners, Law, Folklore</i>]
	400s—Language [<i>Dictionaries, Foreign Languages</i>]
	500s—Natural Science [<i>Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology</i>]
	600s—Technology and Applied Science [<i>Inventions, Health</i>]
	700s—Fine Arts [<i>Art, Music, Crafts, Sports, Hobbies</i>]
	800s—Literature [<i>Poetry, Plays, Short Stories</i>]
	900s—History [<i>Geography, Biography, Travel</i>]

1. *The Bad Beginning*—What if this book was a Greek myth about Chaos and Oceanus and their role in the creation of the universe? _____
2. *The Reptile Room*—What if this book was about snakes and lizards? _____
3. *The Wide Window*—What if this was the title of an encyclopedia that described everything that could be seen from a very wide window? _____
4. *The Miserable Mill*—What if this book described the terrible working conditions during the industrial revolution that led to the creation of labor unions? _____
5. *The Austere Academy*—What if this book told of Plato's philosophy based on his deep thoughts and teachings? _____
6. *The Ersatz Elevator*—What if this book was about some of the crazy and ill-fated inventions that changed the world? _____
7. *The Vile Village*—What if this book contained the theory that Big Foot, Crop Circles and UFO's may have one small nasty place in common? _____
8. *The Hostile Hospital*—What if this book was about the diseases discovered and the medicine made to cure them in a hospital during a horrible war? _____
9. *The Carnivorous Carnival*—What if this was a book of illustrations and instructions on how to make costumes for circus folk like clowns and jugglers? _____
10. *The Slippery Slope*—What if this was a book about the geography of the Andes Mountains? _____
11. *The Grim Grotto*—What if this was a book containing collection of sad short stories? _____
12. *The Penultimate Peril*—What if this was a book about how to stay out of trouble by using grammar correctly? _____

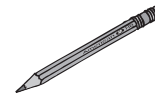
Author's Alliteration Alert!

Lemony Snicket has written twelve books for A Series of Unfortunate Events. Each has an alliterative title. Alliteration is the repetition of beginning consonant sounds. Mr. Snicket also starts each title with the word "The" and follows it with two words, usually an adjective and a noun. In the twelve titles to date, no letter of the alphabet has been repeated. Using this knowledge can you create a possible title for the next and last book in the series? (*The letters D, F, I, J, K, L, N, O, Q, T, U, X, Y and Z have not been used.*)

1. *The Bad Beginning*
2. *The Reptile Room*
3. *The Wide Window*
4. *The Miserable Mill*
5. *The Austere Academy*
6. *The Ersatz Elevator*
7. *The Vile Village*
8. *The Hostile Hospital*
9. *The Carnivorous Carnival*
10. *The Slippery Slope*
11. *The Grim Grotto*
12. *The Penultimate Peril*
13. ?



What might be some titles for the thirteenth book?



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



Dewey Decimal Shelf Search

Use strategy, skill and speed to search your library's shelves and complete as much of the chart as you can in the allocated time. Extra points can be earned if the book selected to represent a Dewey Decimal Group has an alliterative title. *(Alliteration is the repetition of beginning consonant sounds.)*

Example

Dewey	Group	Title (10 points)	Author (2 points)	Alliterative Title (5 bonus points)
400-499	Language	Grammar is Great! Verbs are Vital!	Ruth Thompson	X

Dewey Numbers	Group	Title (10 points)	Author (2 points)	Alliterative Title (5 bonus points)
000-099	General Works			
100-199	Philosophy			
200-299	Religion			
300-399	Social Sciences			
400-499	Language			
500-599	Natural Science			
600-699	Technology			
700-799	The Arts			
800-899	Literature			
900-999	History & Geography			

SCORE:

Listed Titles _____ x 10 = _____

Listed Authors _____ x 2 = _____

Bonus Points _____ x 5 = _____

