

Introduction: A Cheat Sheet to the Mystery Genre

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What is Mystery Fiction?

YA mystery novels differ from adult mystery novels, especially in the definition of what constitutes a mystery. While adult mysteries typically have a detective, cop, or other professional solving the mystery, YA novels do not. Instead, YA mysteries have average teenagers uncovering clues and solving crimes (Rossiter, 2013). Overall, the YA mystery genre is simple to define: if something needs to be solved, it is likely a mystery. Typically, the plot of a mystery unfolds as it is read. As the definition of the genre is so broad, YA mysteries often transcend into other genres as well.

Many YA mysteries centre around crime. Does that mean you have to enjoy crime-themed novels in order to enjoy mystery novels? No! There is a sub-genre of mysteries referred to as “cozy” mysteries; these lack violence (Book Country, 2015). While crime and mystery tend to go hand-in-hand, mystery novels can be found in

many other genres, such as science fiction and contemporary. Therefore, mystery can appeal to all types of readers, as there are mystery novels in all genres.

Mystery novels appeal to teen readers because of the element of challenge. In addition to being thrilling and suspenseful, mystery novels allow the reader to join in on solving the mystery. Teens can pick up on clues while reading, challenging them to solve the puzzle before the characters do (Seisser, 2012).

Mysteries also work well as crossover books that appeal to both teens and adults. Classic adult books, such as *Sherlock Holmes* and the Agatha Christie novels, often appeal to teen readers.

A recent trend in mystery fiction is series, with many authors deciding to expand their stories into multi-book works. This allows for the mystery to delve deeper into the plot, and to make the mystery even more elaborate (Francisco & Jensen, 2013).

What You Need to Know

Authors

If you are interested in the mystery genre, there are some YA authors you need to be aware of. The following list is of recent YA authors who have written many popular mystery novels:

- Ally Carter
- Caroline B. Cooney
- E. Lockhart
- Jennifer Lynn Barnes
- Ransom Riggs
- Sally Green
- Sara Shepard

Awards

Awards exist that focus specifically on the mystery genre, and knowing award-winners helps you know reputable reads. The following awards focus on mystery novels and have a category dedicated to YA mysteries:

- Agatha Award: Recognizes the best mystery, suspense, and thriller novels, and it includes a category dedicated to the best children and YA novels (Lance, 2013)
- Edgar Award: Presented by the Mystery Writers of America (Mystery Writers of America, 2015)

Publishers

While mystery can be found in an array of different books, the following list is of publishers that focus on publishing YA mystery novels:

- The Poison Pencil: A small publishing company that exclusively publishes YA mysteries (Rosenwald & Larson, 2015)
- Soho Teen: A publishing company that recently created a focus on YA mysteries (Seisser, 2014)

More Resources!

Websites

- Book County—Mysteries:
<http://www.bookcountry.com/ReadAndReview/Books/GenreMap/Mystery.aspx>
- Sleuths, Spies, and Alibis:
<http://sleuthsspiesandalibis.blogspot.ca/>
- Stacked: Mysteries and Thrillers:
<http://www.stackedbooks.org/2013/04/get-genrefied-mysteries-thrillers.html>
- YALSA Genre Guide: Mysteries for Teens:
<http://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2014/04/29/genre-guide-mysteries-for-teens>

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