**MYSTERY**

|  |
| --- |
| **DEFINITION:** Detective and mystery novels are stories in which a crime, usually but not always a murder, has been committed, and the means, motive, and criminal are in doubt or unknown. This problem is presented to an amateur or professional detective who accepts the puzzle and its clues and who then solves it. Contemporary authors in this genre are stressing the why—the psychology behind the crime—above the who, when, and how that have been the hallmarks of the classic detective and mystery novel. Specialists abound in today’s mysteries, whether forensic experts in a police procedural or amateur detectives whose interest in rare books, horse racing, or cosmetology is as important to the story as the solving of the crime. Recent trends are the use of paranormal creatures such as vampires and ghosts in the stories and the emphasis on the reader's emotional involvement with the character. |

**CHARACTERISTICS:** Mysteries present a challenge to the reader who must use the clues to solve the crime. The stories are usually intricately plotted but can be either fast paced and suspenseful or slower paced with lots of detail and description.  The protagonist can be an amateur detective who just happens to find a dead body, a police detective, or a private eye.  The stories can be very realistic and recreate the real world of the police or crime with gritty language, violence, and sex.  Amateur detective mysteries can by light hearted with the violence off stage, but even these now have a love interest and some sex.  Most mysteries feature a series character that readers get to know and identify with through the books.  Authors delve into the psychology of the characters while the crimes often reflect the problems of society including drugs, greed, corruption, runaways, child abuse, and more.  The end of the story must tie up all loose ends and solve the crime.

**APPEAL:** Mysteries appeal to readers on many levels—as puzzles that are a battle of wits between the reader and the sleuth, as a morality play where the hero slays evil and saves mankind, as entertainment that tells a good story with a satisfying resolution, as an acceptable way to channel aggressive thoughts and act out aggressive fantasies, as a way to learn about special subjects or problems, and as stories with characters that  have strong emotional appeal.

**READERS:** Mystery readers come in all ages from pre-teen to seniors. These are people who like their stories based in the real world and want to see good defeat evil.  Traditionally women have read the amateur detective and cozy subgenres while men like the hard hitting and more realistic police procedural, private eye, and crime subgenres.  Today women are also reading these subgenres as women authors have created women police detectives and women private eyes.  Many men may not read women writers although this too is changing.

**TRENDS:**Development of main character and readers emotional involvement with the character  
Weaving specialized subjects such as cooking, gardening, anthropology, sports into the mystery  
Adding suspense elements into mysteries and blurring the lines between suspense and mystery  
The rise of the historical mystery, especially those set from 1920 to 1960  
The return of the cozy and the use of humor in the story  
The use of paranormal elements such as ghosts and vampires in the stories  
Mystery writers doing both series characters and stand alone mysteries that feature psychological suspense

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Classic | Raymond Chandler, Agatha Christie, Wilkie Collins, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Dashiell Hammett, Ed McBain, Ellis Peters, Edgar Allan Poe, Mickey Spillane, Jim Thompson |
| Amateur Detective | Nevada Barr, Jan Burke, John Dunning, Dick Francis, Jonathan Kellerman, Margaret Maron, Julia Spencer-Fleming, Stuart Woods |
| Cozy | Lillian Jackson Braun, Jill Churchill, Diane Mott Davidson, Joanne Fluke, Earlene Fowler, Carolyn Hart |
| Crime/Caper | Lawrence Block, Tim Dorsey, Carl Hiaasen, Elmore Leonard, Donald E. Westlake |
| Historical | Lindsey Davis, P.C. Doherty, Anne Perry, Elizabeth Peters, Charles Todd, Jacqueline Winspear |
| Humorous | Donna Andrews, M.C. Beaton, Rita Mae Brown, Janet Evanovich, Joan Hess |
| International | Cara Black (France), Kerry Greenwood (Australia), Roderic Jeffries (Majorca), Stieg Larsson (Sweden), Donna Leon (Italy), Henning Mankell (Sweden), Magdalen Nabb (Italy) |
| Police | Michael Connelly, Deborah Crombie, Elizabeth George, Martha Grimes, Tony Hillerman, P.D. James, J.A. Jance, Faye Kellerman, William Kent Krueger, Michael McGarrity, Ian Rankin, Peter Robinson |
| Private Investigator | James Lee Burke, Robert Crais, Sue Grafton, Laura Lippman, Walter Mosley, Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, Robert B. Parker |