

Mystery Fiction

Curriculum: NOVICE

Creator: Dar Bagby



NOTE: This topic is divided into two lessons. We suggest you spread the information over two sessions in order to cover all of the material.

Definition: Mystery fiction is a genre involving a crime with puzzle elements that characters (and readers) must sort through and decipher in an attempt to outwit criminals and solve the mystery.

Goals: 1) Be familiar with the history of the progression of the mystery novel in literature.
2) Be able to name some famous mystery authors and famous characters created by those authors.
3) Be able to describe the genre and list some of its multiple sub-genres.

Tools: 1) An electronic device with the capability for connecting to the Internet should be available for each enthusiast.
2) One NOVICE HANDOUT for each enthusiast.

Ice Breaker:

- One at a time the overseer should call out the names of these **AUTHORS** and ask the enthusiasts to raise their hands if they are familiar with any of them: Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Edgar Allan Poe, Sue Grafton, Dashiell Hammett, Dick Francis, Erle Stanley Gardner, Tony Hillerman, Ellery Queen, Raymond Chandler, Ian Fleming, Tom Clancy
- One at a time the overseer should call out the names of these **CHARACTERS** and ask the enthusiasts to raise their hands if they are familiar with any of them: Sherlock Holmes, Charlie Chan, Sam Spade, Miss Marple, Inspector Bucket, Hercule Poirot, Philip Marlowe, Kinsey Milhone, Dr. Kay Scarpetta

- Overseer explains that all of the above are associated with the genre of Mystery Fiction (the mystery novel).

Lesson 1

- Distribute the HANDOUT.
- With the enthusiasts following along on the HANDOUT, discuss the following topics:

I. History of the mystery novel

- A. Crime and suspense can be found in ancient and religious texts but would later become “detective fiction,” and in the 19th century became “mystery fiction.”
1. In the Old Testament of the Bible the story of Susanna and the Elders involves a cross examination of two witnesses.
 2. In the play *Oedipus Rex* by the ancient Greek playwright, Sophocles, the main character uncovers the truth about a murder and brings about the eventual exposure of a secret past by questioning various witnesses.
 3. The earliest known example of an actual detective story is “The Three Apples,” one of the stories narrated by Scheherazade in *The One Thousand and One Nights*.
- B. The first detective fiction written in the Western tradition is attributed to Edgar Allan Poe (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*) in 1841.
- C. Other early detective fiction stories include: Charles Dickens 1853 (*Bleak House*), Charles Warren Adams whose pen name was Charles Felix 1862 (*Notting Hill Mystery*), Mary Elizabeth Braddon 1863 (*Aurora Floyd*), Wilkie Collins 1868 (*The Moonstone*), and Athur Conan Doyle 1887 (*A Study in Scarlet*) who created Sherlock Holmes—arguably the most famous of all fictional detectives and was featured in four novels and fifty-six short stories.
1. Mystery was being written simultaneously in countries other than the United States, especially in England and China, so it was difficult to define who actually wrote the very first one.
 2. During the literary inquisitions and wars in ancient China, many of the works may have been destroyed.
- D. The 1920s and 1930s are generally referred to as the “Golden Age of Detective Fiction,” during which many popular writers emerged, mostly British, but also notable American and New Zealand authors.
1. A large number of these authors were female; the following are considered the original “Queens of Crime.”
 - a. Agatha Christie (England)
 - b. Dorothy L. Sayers (England)
 - c. Ngaio Marsh (New Zealand)
 - d. Margery Allingham (England)
 2. Writer Ronald Knox composed a “Decalogue” of rules for detective fiction.

- a. Avoid supernatural elements.
- b. The main interest must be presented to the reader at an early state in the proceedings and must arouse curiosity, the gratification of which arrives at the end of the story.
- c. This emphasis on formal rules affected different writers in different ways: some followed them to the letter, others exploited them in order to create new, and often startling, results.

II. How the mystery novel became so popular

A. Inspiration from contemporary figures

- 1. Al Capone and the Mob, late 1920s, piqued mainstream curiosity about the American underworld.
- 2. Pulp fiction magazines (e.g., *Black Mask*) published violent stories focusing on the mayhem and the injustices that surrounded criminals.

B. Stories and novels about PIs (private investigators, or private eyes) began to emerge.

- 1. British author Arthur Morrison created perhaps the first of the modern fictional private detective, Martin Hewitt, in 1894.
- 2. The private eye genre exploded in 1930s America.
 - a. Dashiell Hammett, Jonathan Latimer, Erle Stanley Gardner, and others presented “stylish” detective fiction concentrating on the legal corruption in the United States that became known as “hard-boiled” mystery
 - b. These most sought-after mysteries contained less concentration on detectives, more concentration on gangsters and crooks, and more interest in victims or committers of crimes
- 3. Raymond Chandler updated the form through his private detective, Philip Marlowe (late 1930s).
 - a. Chandler wrote about dark alleys, tough thugs, rich women, and powerful men
 - b. Use of eloquent language with “cadenced dialogue and cryptic narrations” eventually brought about feature and television movies with Philip Marlowe as the main character
- 4. Ross Macdonald (pseudonym of Kenneth Millar) created detective Lew Archer.
 - a. Macdonald was a writer of hard-boiled mysteries; employed the use of violence, sex, and confrontation
 - b. He used the psychological and sociological aspects of crime and wrote with exceptional prose that offered an impression of realism in his work

D. The PI genre was male-dominated; female authors seldom found publication until the late 1970s and early 1980s.

- 1. Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton, Patricia Cornwell
 - a. All are female authors.
 - b. All wrote (write) about female detectives who were (are) intelligent and

physically competent.

2. Following their success, publishers began to seek out other female authors.

III. Short mystery fiction and its comparison to a mystery novel

A. Word length

1. Short story = 1000 to 7500 words
2. Novel = 50,000 to 110,000 words

B. Things that can/cannot be accomplished in short fiction

1. There is little chance to set up and develop characters, plant clues, and expose a perpetrator (perp) the way novels do.
2. The crime story is more of a “twist” than the fully developed plot found in a novel.
3. Short fiction is more suited to TV, such as “Alfred Hitchcock Presents.”
4. Novels contain a higher proportion of puzzles and can incorporate a larger number of characters.

Activity

- Ask each enthusiast to choose one author OR one character and look up that person online.
- Have each enthusiast read a couple of interesting points about their person of choice.

Discussion

- Why is mystery fiction such a popular genre?
- When did it become popular in the United States?
- What other countries developed mystery fiction at about the same time as the United States?

NOTE: If you have chosen to divide Mystery Fiction into two separate sessions, remind the enthusiasts to bring the HANDOUT with them to the next session.

Lesson 2

- If you have chosen to divide “Mystery Fiction” into two separate sessions, make sure each enthusiast has his/her copy of the HANDOUT.

I. Mystery fiction as a genre

- A. There are some specific items mystery fiction must contain in order to classify as a genre.

1. A crime
 2. A criminal (perpetrator)
 3. Usually either a professional or an amateur detective who can outwit the criminal and solve the crime
 4. A puzzle element
 5. Clues
 6. Over the course of the book, a complete story must be disclosed and can be classified by any one or a combination of the following:
 - a. type of problem (murder, robbery, etc.)
 - b. setting (in a series of mystery novels, the crime solver typically travels around in order to provide new challenges)
 - c. the people or the type of detective(s)—professional, private, amateur, gender specific—who solve the mystery
- B. In the past, mystery fiction was divided into four main categories
1. Ratiocinative (Sherlock Holmes, Charlie Chan)
 - a. emphasis on the puzzle and clues
 - b. the crime solver generally draws large conclusions from small observations
 2. Cozy (Agatha Christie)
 - a. domestic setting; small enclosed community
 - b. amateur detective
 - c. concentrates more on the people than the clues
 - d. usually slow-paced
 - e. a violent crime is not unpleasant for the reader (no hack-and-slay elements)
 3. Hard-boiled (Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler)
 - a. either a private detective or a criminal may be the main character
 - b. may or may not contain a puzzle
 - c. story is about the seedier side of life
 - d. relates to pulp fiction or Noir (if there is any humor, it will be dark)
 - e. centers on realism
 - f. usually takes place in an urban setting
 4. Police Procedural (Joseph Wambaugh, James Patterson, Patricia Cornwell)
 - a. usually more about the police than the case; may focus loosely on the melodrama of their lives
 - b. may focus tightly on one case or cover several cases simultaneously
 - c. attempts to describe all of the activities of the police when solving the crime
 - c. also includes forensics, autopsies, interviews/interrogations
- C. The genres overlap, so it's possible that no clear distinction can be made about a story without considering a sub-genre
- D. The huge amount of sub-genres that are present in mystery fiction makes it a great

choice for reading, as it covers such a wide field of reader preferences.

II. Sub-genres of mystery (in alphabetical order)

A. Amateur Sleuth

1. The amateur sleuth tries to solve the murder of someone close to him/her.
2. These are usually only one-timers since disaster seldom happens to the same person over and over again (at least in real life).

B. Animal Mystery

1. An animal is central to the story.
2. They sometimes talk; sometimes the reader hears them think; sometimes they are a pet of the main character but are important to the story.

C. Caper

1. A newer form of sub-genre
2. Humorous/comic; usually outrageous
3. Features loveable, bungling characters
4. Perps are often referred to as “scoundrels”

D. Crime Novel

1. The suspense in this type of mystery originates in the uncertainty of whether the plan will work.
2. The reader roots for the bad guys, who are intelligent, savvy, organized, daring, and often dashing.
3. Contains broad of approaches to the subject
4. Often told from the point of view of the criminal
5. The reader knows whodunit but not how the story will resolve itself.
6. The good guys and the bad guys usually share equal time throughout the story.

E. Cyber Mystery (see Virtual Mystery)

F. Disaster Mystery: natural disasters (tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.) or disasters such as plane crashes, the sinking of ocean cruise liners, etc. are a major part of the story.

G. Espionage (Secret Agent) Novel

1. May be a thriller
2. May or may not involve technological aspects

H. Ethnic Mystery

1. The main character’s ethnic background is central to the story.
2. AND/OR...The ethnicity of the location is a major contributor to the outcome.

I. Government Agency Mystery: the story centers around the FBI, the CIA, the KGB, or National Parks/Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, etc.

J. High-Tech Mystery: current and/or future technology is an important factor in the story.

K. Historical Mystery: many take place in the far distant past, but most occur in the pre-1940 period.

L. Holiday Mystery

1. The story centers around a particular holiday.

2. Some are religious, some are national.

M. Legal Mystery

1. Usually takes place in an attorney's office
2. Can take place in a courtroom

N. Locked Room Mystery

1. The murder victim is discovered in a space without an apparent exit.
2. The reader must be convinced that there is no way the murderer could have exited.
3. In actuality, there has been a simple explanation from the beginning.

O. Married Couple Mystery

1. A couple works together to solve the mystery.
2. The couple are usually amateur detectives.

P. Medical Mystery

1. The main character works in a medically-related field.
2. AND/OR...The story's central location is a hospital.

Q. Noir

1. Most often the PI is a hard-boiled character.
2. The story, characters, and outcomes are covered by dark emotions.
3. The atmosphere is very dark, as well as the themes and actions.

R. Occult: the story line centers around the occult in some way.

S. Pastiche

1. A technique wherein an author imitates another author's style and/or characters.
2. The technique must be done in a very respectful way.

T. Political Intrigue: politics is essential to the story.

U. Psychological Suspense Novel

1. The protagonist is generally a psychiatrist/psychologist who helps a local law enforcement agency.
2. The book often explores the psyche of the criminal's mind or the psychology behind the crime.

V. Religious Fictional Mystery: usually a religion or consecrated building is the center of the action.

W. Romantic Suspense; romance is generally more important than the mystery.

X. Senior Sleuths: the amateur detectives in these stories are usually "older" and/or retired.

Y. Serial Killer Novel

1. The perpetrator is a serial killer.
2. These novels are generally hardcore; descriptions are not for the faint-of-heart.

Z. Soft-boiled Mystery

1. Less explicit than hard-boiled with less violence
2. The detective is often female.

AA. Steampunk Mystery Novel

1. Steampunk takes an alternate view of history; "What would the world be like

today if steam had never been replaced?”

2. Full of anachronisms
3. Fashions, architecture, and culture are most often modeled after Victorian Britain.

BB. Supernatural Mystery Novel: the supernatural emphasizes the story.

CC. Suspense Novel

1. Tension
2. Danger is likely to be more psychological than physical.
3. Based more on fear and/or expectation of harm than on actual hazardous situations
4. The protagonist, usually innocent, is caught up in danger.
5. May be punctuated by horror

DD. Thriller

1. The major concern is the plot.
2. The story contains ample amounts of action.
3. The protagonist is placed in a dangerous situation(s), usually physically dangerous.
4. Spies are usually everywhere.
5. The object may be to prevent a crime from happening rather than solving a crime already committed.
6. The protagonist in this type of mystery is definitely a professional.
7. Sub-sub-genres in this category include **eco-thrillers**, wherein the world is threatened by an ecological disaster, and **techno-thrillers** which include highly modern technical weapons and equipment on both sides.

EE. Time-travel Mystery

1. The protagonist either goes forward or backward in time.
2. Often part of the suspense exists in whether he/she will be able to return to his/her present day.

FF. True Crime Novel

1. Deals with a real crime, with or without a murder
2. Examines the motives of real people and events
3. Can be both highly speculative and basically factual at the same time
4. This type of novel allows the reader to form his/her own opinions and draw his/her own conclusions.
5. The crimes are either pulled from current events or are cases from the past (e.g., JFK's assassination, Jack the Ripper murders, etc.)

GG. Twist Mysteries

1. Usually short fiction (1000 to 7500 words)
2. Ideal for TV series
3. See **Lesson 1, III. Short mystery fiction and its comparison to a mystery Novel, What can be accomplished in short fiction.**

HH. Urban Fantasy

1. Defined by geography

2. Has supernatural or fantasy elements but must take place in a city (usually the larger the better; usually on Earth)
 3. Can be set during any time period (past, present, or future)
- II. Vampire Mystery: vampires can be either the bad guys or the good guys.
- JJ. Virtual Mystery (Cyber Mystery): obviously fantasy, but it reaches out further to the reader due to the crime committed, the conflict, and the puzzles involved
- KK. Whodunit, Howdunit, Whydunit
1. Whodunit lists the suspects, looks for a motive, and names the perpetrator.
 2. Howdunit employs tricks (e.g., Alfred Hitchcock wrote of a woman who killed her husband with a frozen leg of lamb. She cooks the weapon and even invites the detective to share it with her at dinner. Unknowingly, he eats the evidence.)
 3. Whydunit is a story in which the motive is essential to solving the case.

Activity

- Describe some of the primary and sub-genres (one at a time) and ask the enthusiasts to name them. They may use their handout sheets as a guide.

Discussion

- Which sub-genre would you be most interested in reading? Writing? Why?

NOTE: If any of the novice enthusiasts are interested in writing in this genre, they should participate in the ADVANCED portion of the session.

Mystery Fiction

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Creator: Dar Bagby



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Methods of Writing a Mystery Novel

Curriculum: ADVANCED

Creator: Dar Bagby



NOTE: If the enthusiasts have not been exposed to the NOVICE lessons, those two lessons should be covered before moving on to the ADVANCED lessons. The NOVICE lessons should be considered prerequisites to the ADVANCED ones.

Review: distribute ADVANCED HANDOUT #1 to those who do not have the NOVICE HANDOUT from the previous lessons in the NOVICE group.

Definition: Mystery fiction is a genre involving a crime with puzzle elements that characters (and readers) must sort through and decipher in an attempt to outwit criminals and solve the mystery.

Goals:

- 1) Be able to identify various genres and sub-genres.
- 2) Be able to prepare a mystery by creating good characters and a foolproof plot.
- 3) Be able to create an outline for a mystery novel.
- 4) Be able to write mystery fiction.

Tools:

- 1) A copy of the ADVANCED HANDOUT #2 for each enthusiast.
- 2) Paper and writing utensil OR an electronic device that can be used for brief written exercises.

Ice Breaker

- 1) Ask the enthusiasts to give a brief history of the mystery novel.
- 2) Read the following examples and have the enthusiasts identify which genre/sub-genre each sample represents.

- I didn't see how I could possibly get by all of the eyes that had been trained on the spot where they had last seen a stranger disappear behind the lighthouse. There was no way I could go back the way I had come, so my only option seemed to be the water. They knew that. But I was not content with the idea of merely diving in. I looked up at the light, its brightness cutting through the spray that flew from the crashing waves against the outcroppings. I began to climb, brick by brick, unaware that someone was waiting for me at the top. (Thriller)
- "We will have to weigh our options," said Gravo, alpha male of the wolf pack. "We cannot simply act as though nothing happened." (Animal)
- Dr. Worley placed the inside of her wrist on her head, as though she were a mother testing her child's temperature. "Are you all right?" Dr. Eversole asked. "You may need to take a bed here at the hospital if you grow any paler." (Medical)
- The charcoal sky settled like volcanic ash over the city, dimming the lights and cast its darkness over Abel's profile. "I feel as lonely as the last man on earth," he said under his breath. The passersby went about their business with their heads down and hoods up, as if seeking shelter from a bad storm. That's when Abel caught a glimpse of the shadow pass in front of him, the same flat, black, floating figure he had seen two nights ago when leaving his office shortly after sundown. (Noir)
- "Simply being born into an Islam household does not automatically make someone a terrorist," I told her. "You need to abandon your old-fashioned prejudices and become an intelligent member of the twenty-first century. You cannot let racism taint your ability to think about other possibilities." (Ethnic)
- The Vicar dropped by for tea on Tuesday, and I invited him to take a walk in the rose garden while the tea was brewing. He opened the gate and stopped stark-still. "My dear," he said and turned to me abruptly. "Has your gardener taken ill?" I told him I hadn't noticed, and he smiled, somewhat tenderly, somewhat sympathetically. "I hate to interrupt our lovely walk," the Vicar apologized, "but he appears to be lying dead just inside the gate." (Cozy)

Lesson

- The overseer should distribute HANDOUT #2 to the enthusiasts.
- With the enthusiasts following along on the HANDOUT, the overseer should discuss the following topics:

I. Coming up with ideas for writing a mystery novel

A. People-watch.

1. Observation is everything when preparing to write a mystery novel.
2. Imagine the story that's going on with a couple, a youngster and the parent, a gaggle of girls, a couple of businessmen, etc.

- a. study their body language
 - b. eavesdrop (even though it's rude!), just don't get caught
- B. Keep a journal.
 - a. record your observations
 - b. record how you felt during certain situations
 - c. make detailed entries about descriptions, opinions (yours and those of others)
 - d. jot down fragments
- C. Start with a real person.
 - 1. Think of someone you know or pick a name from the phone book.
 - 2. Imagine something that might cause him/her to commit a crime.
 - 3. Maybe you have thought about killing someone.
- B. Start with real-life crimes.
 - 1. Read newspapers and watch the news.
 - 2. Research crimes that have happened recently.
 - 3. Imagine a story around a recent crime.
 - 4. Imagine yourself as either the perpetrator or the detective.
- C. Start with a fictional character.
 - 1. Describe that character.
 - 2. Imagine a motive that would cause that person to commit murder, or imagine that character as a professional or amateur sleuth and figure out how he/she would go about solving a crime.
- D. Think about possible clues and suspects surrounding a crime.

II. Getting a good start

- A. Create your protagonist.
- B. Map out exactly how the crime was committed.
- C. Make sure your murderer has a sound motive.
- D. Create the end of your book before you write it, then you can work toward it
- E. Make a list of clues that can be scattered throughout the story.
- F. Make up some "red herrings" (false clues) to include in your story.
- G. Decide which clue is the one that will clinch the solution to the crime.
- H. Make a list of suspects. Again, use some "red herrings" to point the detective (and the reader) toward the wrong conclusions so the ending will be a surprise.
- I. Research is priority one!
 - 1. No matter how you choose to commit the crime in your story, your methods must be accurate.
 - 2. Likewise, your sleuth must use only available resources and correct procedures to reach the climax of the story (which is when the reader finds out the solution).
 - 3. If you get any of the technical details wrong, readers WILL notice, and you will lose credibility as a mystery writer.
- J. Don't cheat your readers.
 - 1. They must find out clues at the same time the detective finds them.

2. Don't hold back any key information that they should know.
 3. Allow the clues to lead logically to the solution.
 4. Play fair!
- K. Plan on making the ending exciting and surprising.
- L. Plan to start your story with immediate action.
- M. Use cliffhangers at the ends of chapters.
1. Create the cliffhangers by putting a key character in danger.
 2. Consider putting your detective in danger at the climax.
- N. Make sure your story is more than a mere brain-teaser.
1. It needs to be a great puzzle.
 2. Find a reason that causes detective and the reader to feel a dire need to solve the crime.

III. Outlining your novel

(**NOTE:** Some authors never outline, they simply start writing. This works for some types of novels, but seldom is it best for writing mystery fiction. Many of those who do not outline end up writing the whole book again once they have finished the first draft. Granted, they often discover new aspects of the story, but bear in mind that they would most likely benefit from putting a little bit of time into the planning stage at the beginning rather than rewriting everything several times at the end.)

- A. The outline is a plan for your novel.
1. Compose the outline for YOU.
 2. There are no rights or wrongs.
 - a. create it in classic outline form or write it with crayons on the bathroom mirror!
 - b. whatever works for you; every author has his/her own system
- B. Reasons for outlining
1. It provides a guide; you know what's coming at every turn.
 2. It helps to avoid writing yourself into a corner (or even a dead end).
 - a. solves story problems before they arise
 - b. keeps you from wasting time writing scenes you may change or cut later
 3. It allows you to set up your ending.
 - a. you know what's coming
 - b. you can prepare the reader for what's coming
 4. It is necessary (for almost all writers).
 - a. keeps you from omitting all the small details
 - b. helps everything fit together at the end
- C. The down-sides of a novel outline
1. The false sense that it stifles creativity
 2. A feeling of less spontaneity
 3. Requires a lot of prerequisite brainstorming
 4. The feeling of getting locked into the original plan
 - a. danger of discovering parts that don't work once you have gotten into

the actual story

b. being afraid to stray from the “original recipe”

D. Things to avoid

1. Don't waste time making the outline something that has to pass an inspection.
 - a. no need to choose the exact wording
 - b. if you decide to color-code, don't use 189 different colors
2. Don't allow your outline to imprison you.
 - a. feel free to change events around
 - b. you don't need to look at it every minute as you write
 - c. go with the flow of your story

E. Some things to consider before starting to outline your novel

1. Do a lot of brainstorming
 - a. let your imagination run wild
 - b. ask a lot of “what ifs”
 - c. write down or record your thoughts as they come to you; organization comes later
2. Ask yourself some questions
 - a. which sub-genre is best suited to my style of writing?
 - b. does my choice of sub-genre match my writing style?

 - c. who will be my main character(s)?
 - d. where will my story take place?
 - e. in what time era?
 - f. what is going to be the main problem in my story?
 - g. why is the main problem so important to my main character(s)?
 - h. what are the terrible difficulties standing in the way of the main character(s) and his/her/their goal?
 - i. have I chosen the best main events to move my story forward?
 - j. will my choice of main events move my character(s) toward or away from the solution?
3. Imagine a scene
 - a. what characters are present?
 - b. whose point of view will cover the scene?
 - c. where does it take place?
 - d. what happens?
 - e. what does it accomplish? does it have a purpose?
 - f. does it move the action forward? backward?
 - g. does it play with the reader's emotions?
 - h. does it deepen the reader's understanding of the character(s) and/or the situation?
 - i. does the order make sense?

F. Writing a summary of your novel's main idea

1. Imagine you are writing the blurb for the back cover (or book jacket).

- a. 1 or 2 paragraphs
 - b. if you can't pin it down, your idea probably isn't focused yet
2. Be sure to include your main character(s) and the goal he/she/they need to achieve.

IV. You're ready to write

- A. Use your outline as your guide.
- B. Rely on the observations you have encountered and the notes you have taken.
- B. Remember how important it is to make the story your own.

Activity

- Ask the enthusiasts which possible sub-genres they may want to consider (if mystery fiction is their choice).
- Have the enthusiasts make a list of supplies they will need before starting to write (e.g., a notebook for jotting down ideas and observations, a notebook for journaling, sunglasses to wear when they are people-watching and eavesdropping! etc.)

Discussion

- 1) Why is an outline especially important when writing a mystery?
- 2) Do you think an outline would be a good idea when writing in other genres? Why?
- 3) Name some places you could go to do people-watching/eavesdropping.

Methods of Writing a Mystery Novel

Handout #1: ADVANCED - Review

Creator: Dar Bagby



REVIEW OF Lesson 1 (NOVICE)

I. History of the mystery novel

- A. Crime and suspense can be found in ancient and religious texts but would later become “detective fiction.”
- B. The first detective fiction written in the Western tradition is attributed to Edgar Allan Poe (*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*) in 1841.
- C. Other early detective fiction stories include: Charles Dickens (*Bleak House*) 1853, Charles Warren Adams whose pen name was Charles Felix (*Notting Hill Mystery*) 1862, Mary Elizabeth Braddon (*Aurora Floyd*) 1863, Wilkie Collins (*The Moonstone*) 1868, and Athur Conan Doyle (*A Study in Scarlet*) 1887 who created Sherlock Holmes—arguably the most famous of all fictional detectives and was featured in four novels and fifty-six short stories.
 1. Mystery was being written simultaneously in countries other than the United States, especially in England and China, so it was difficult to define who actually wrote the very first one.
 2. During the literary inquisitions and wars in ancient China, many of the works may have been destroyed.
- D. The 1920s and 1930s are generally referred to as the “Golden Age of Detective Fiction,” during which many popular writers emerged, mostly British, but also notable American and New Zealand authors.
 1. A large number of these authors were female; the following are considered the original “Queens of Crime.”
 - a. Agatha Christie (England)
 - b. Dorothy L. Sayers (England)
 - c. Ngaio Marsh (New Zealand)
 - d. Margery Allingham (England)
 2. Writer Ronald Knox composed a “Decalogue” of rules for detective fiction.

II. How the mystery novel became so popular

- A. Inspiration from contemporary figures
- B. Stories and novels about PIs (private investigators, or private eyes) began to emerge.
 1. British author Arthur Morrison created perhaps the first of the modern fictional private detective, Martin Hewitt, in 1894.

2. The private eye genre exploded in the 1930s in America.
 - a. Dashiell Hammett, Jonathan Latimer, Erle Stanley Gardner, and others presented “stylish” detective fiction concentrating on the legal corruption in the United States that became known as “hard-boiled” mystery.
 - b. These most sought-after mysteries contained less concentration on detectives, more concentration on gangsters and crooks, and more interest in victims or committers of crimes
 3. Raymond Chandler updated the form through his private detective, Philip Marlowe (late 1930s).
 4. Ross Macdonald (pseudonym of Kenneth Millar) created detective Lew Archer.
 - a. Macdonald was a writer of hard-boiled mysteries; employed the use of violence, sex, and confrontation.
 - b. He used the psychological and sociological aspects of crime and wrote with exceptional prose that offered an impression of realism in his work.
- C. The PI genre was male-dominated; female authors seldom found publication until the late 1970s and early 1980s.
1. Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, and Sue Grafton
 - a. All are female authors.
 - b. All wrote (write) about female detectives who were (are) intelligent and physically competent.
 2. Following their success, publishers began to seek out other female authors.

III. Short mystery fiction and its comparison to a mystery novel

A. Word length

1. Short story = 1000 to 7500 words
2. Novel = 50,000 to 110,000 words

B. What can be done in short fiction?

1. There is little chance to set up and develop characters, plant clues, and expose a perpetrator (perp) the way novels do.
2. The crime story is more of a “twist” than the fully developed plot found in a novel.
3. Short fiction is more suited to TV, such as “Alfred Hitchcock Presents.”
4. Novels contain a much higher proportion of puzzles and can incorporate a much larger number of characters.

REVIEW OF Lesson 2 (NOVICE)

I. Mystery fiction as a genre

- A. There are some specific items mystery fiction must contain in order to classify as a genre. They are as follows:
 1. A crime
 2. A criminal (perpetrator)

3. Usually either a professional or an amateur detective who can outwit the criminal and solve the crime
 4. A puzzle element
 5. Clues
 6. Over the course of the book, a complete story must be
- B. In the past, mystery fiction was divided into four main categories as follows:
1. Ratiocinative (Sherlock Holmes, Charlie Chan)
 2. Cozy (Agatha Christie)
 3. Hard-boiled (Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler)
 4. Police Procedural (Joseph Wambaugh, James Patterson, Patricia Cornwall)
- C. The genres overlap, so it's possible that no clear distinction can be made about a story without considering a sub-genre
- D. The huge amount of sub-genres that are present in mystery fiction makes it a great choice for reading, as it covers such a wide field of reader preferences.

II. Sub-genres of mystery (in alphabetical order)

A. Amateur Sleuth

1. The amateur sleuth tries to solve the murder of someone close to him/her.
2. These are usually only one-timers since disaster seldom happens to the same person over and over again (at least in real life).

B. Animal Mystery

1. An animal is central to the story.
2. They sometimes talk; sometimes the reader hears them think; sometimes they are a pet of the main character but are somehow important to the story.

C. Caper

1. A newer form of sub-genre
2. Humorous/comic; usually outrageous
3. Features loveable, bungling characters
4. Perps are often referred to as "scoundrels."

D. Crime Novel

1. The suspense in this type of mystery originates in the uncertainty of whether the plan will work.
2. The reader roots for the bad guys, who are intelligent, savvy, organized, daring, and often dashing.
3. Contains a broad of approaches to the subject
4. Often told from the point of view of the criminal
5. The reader knows whodunit but not how the story will resolve itself.
6. The good guys and the bad guys usually share equal time throughout the story.

E. Cyber Mystery (see Virtual Mystery)

F. Disaster Mystery: natural disasters (tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.) or disasters such as plane crashes, the sinking of ocean cruise liners, etc. are a major part of the story.

G. Espionage (Secret Agent) Novel

1. May be a thriller
 2. May or may not involve technological aspects
- H. Ethnic Mystery
1. The main character's ethnic background is central to the story.
 2. OR...The ethnicity of the location is a major contributor to the outcome.
- I. Government Agency Mystery: the story centers around the FBI, the CIA, the KGB, or National Parks/Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, etc.
- J. High-Tech Mystery: current and/or future technology is an important factor in the story.
- K. Historical Mystery: many take place in the far distant past, but most occur in the pre-1940 period.
- L. Holiday Mystery
1. The story centers around a particular holiday.
 2. Some are religious, some are national.
- M. Legal Mystery
1. Usually takes place in an attorney's office
 2. Can take place in a courtroom
- N. Locked Room Mystery
1. The murder victim is discovered in a space without an apparent exit
 2. The reader must be convinced that there is no way the murderer could have exited.
 3. In actuality, there has been a simple explanation from the beginning.
- O. Married Couple Mystery
1. A couple works together to solve the mystery.
 2. The couple are usually amateur detectives.
- P. Medical Mystery
1. The main character works in a medically-related field.
 2. OR...The story's central location is a hospital.
- Q. Noir
1. Most often the PI is a hard-boiled character.
 2. The story, characters, and outcomes are covered by dark emotions.
 3. The atmosphere is very dark, as well as the themes and actions.
- R. Occult: the story line centers around the occult in some way.
- S. Pastiche
1. A technique wherein an author imitates another author's style and/or characters.
 2. The technique must be done in a very respectful way.
- T. Political Intrigue: politics is essential to the story.
- U. Psychological Suspense Novel
1. The protagonist is generally a psychiatrist/psychologist who helps a local law enforcement agency.
 2. The book often explores the psyche of the criminal's mind or the psychology behind the crime.

V. Religious Fictional Mystery: usually a religion or consecrated building is the center of the action.

W. Romantic Suspense; romance is generally more important than the mystery.

X. Senior Sleuths: the amateur detectives in these stories are usually “older” and/or retired.

Y. Serial Killer Novel

1. The perpetrator is a serial killer.
2. These novels are generally hardcore; descriptions are not for the faint-of-heart.

Z. Soft-boiled Mystery

1. Less explicit than hard-boiled with less violence
2. The detective is often female.

AA. Steampunk Mystery Novel

1. Steampunk takes an alternate view of history; “What would the world be like today if steam had never been replaced?”
2. Full of anachronisms
3. Fashions, architecture, and culture are most often modeled after Victorian Britain.

BB. Supernatural Mystery Novel: the supernatural emphasizes the story.

CC. Suspense Novel

1. Tension
2. Danger is likely to be more psychological than physical.
3. Based more on fear and/or expectation of harm than on actual hazardous situations
4. The protagonist, usually innocent, is caught up in danger.
5. May be punctuated by horror

DD. Thriller

1. The major concern is the plot.
2. The story contains ample amounts of action.
3. The protagonist is placed in a dangerous situation(s), usually physically dangerous.
4. Spies are usually everywhere.
5. The object may be to prevent a crime from happening rather than solving a crime already committed.
6. The protagonist in this type of mystery is definitely a professional.
7. Sub-sub genres in this category include **eco-thrillers**, wherein the world is threatened by an ecological disaster, and **techno-thrillers** which include highly modern technical weapons and equipment on both sides.

EE. Time-travel Mystery

1. The protagonist either goes forward or backward in time.
2. Often part of the suspense exists in whether he/she will be able to return to his/her present day.

FF. True Crime Novel

1. Deals with a real crime, with or without a murder

2. Examines the motives of real people and events
3. Can be both highly speculative and basically factual at the same time
4. This type of novel allows the reader to form his/her own opinions and draw his/her own conclusions.
5. The crimes are either pulled from current events or are cases from the past (e.g., JFK's assassination, Jack the Ripper murders, etc.)

GG. Twist Mysteries

1. Usually short fiction (1000 to 7500 words)
2. Ideal for TV series
3. See **Lesson 1, III. Short mystery fiction and its comparison to a mystery Novel, What can be done in short fiction?**

HH. Urban Fantasy

1. Defined by geography
2. Has supernatural or fantasy elements but must take place in a city (usually the larger the better; usually on Earth)
3. Can be set during any time period (past, present, or future)

II. Vampire Mystery: vampires can be either the bad guys or the good guys.

JJ. Virtual Mystery (Cyber Mystery): obviously fantasy, but it reaches out further to the reader due to the crime committed, the conflict, and the puzzles involved

KK. Whodunit, Howdunit, Whydunit

1. Whodunit lists the suspects, looks for a motive, and names the perpetrator.
2. Howdunit employs tricks (e.g., Alfred Hitchcock wrote of a woman who killed her husband with a frozen leg of lamb. She cooks the weapon and even invites the detective to share it with her at dinner. Unknowingly, he eats the evidence.)
3. Whydunit is a story in which the motive is essential to solving the case.

Methods of Writing a Mystery Novel

Handout #2: ADVANCED

Creator: Dar Bagby



Definition: Mystery fiction is a genre involving a crime with puzzle elements that characters (and readers) must sort through and decipher in an attempt to outwit criminals and solve the mystery.

I. Coming up with ideas for writing a mystery novel

A. People-watch.

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2. Imagine the story that's going on with a couple, a youngster and the parent, a gaggle of girls, a couple of businessmen, etc.
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 - 1. It needs to be a great puzzle.
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III. Outlining your novel

(NOTE: Some authors never outline, they simply start writing. This works for some types of novels, but seldom is it best for writing mystery fiction. Many of those who do not outline end up writing the whole book again once they have finished the first draft. Granted, they often discover new aspects of the story, but bear in mind that they would most likely benefit from putting a little bit of time into the planning stage at the beginning rather than rewriting everything several times at the end.)

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3. Imagine a scene

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