

The Five Essential Elements of a Mystery

A mystery is a story that has five basic but important elements. These five components are: the characters, the setting, the plot, the problem, and the solution. These essential elements keep the story running smoothly and allow the clues to the solution of the mystery to be revealed in a logical way that the reader can follow.

Characters

The characters are the individuals that the story is about. The author should introduce the characters in the story with enough information that the reader can visualize each person. This is achieved by providing detailed descriptions of a character's physical attributes and personality traits. Every story should have a main character. The main character determines the way the plot or mystery will develop and is usually the person who will solve the problem the story centers upon. However, the other characters are also very important because they can provide clues to solve the mystery or they may even try to throw the main character (and the reader!) off track. All characters should stay true to the author's description throughout the story so that the reader can understand and believe the action that is taking place—and perhaps even predict which character may do what next.

Setting

The setting is the location of the action. An author should describe the environment or surroundings of the mystery in such detail that the reader feels that he or she can picture the scene. Unusual settings (such as a fantasy world) can be interesting, but everyday settings can help a reader to better visualize the story. It can be especially fun to use a familiar setting for a mystery so that the reader feels even more connected to the plot!

Plot

The plot is the actual story around which the entire book is based. A plot should have a very clear beginning, middle and end—with all the necessary descriptions and suspense—so that the reader can make sense of the action and follow along from start to finish.

Problem

Every mystery has a problem to solve, usually who committed a crime and why. Authors should fill mystery stories with clues, so that the reader can try to solve the puzzle along with the characters. Sometimes, an author may insert a false clue just to throw the character (and reader) off.

Solution

The solution to the problem is the way the action is resolved—finding a missing item or the person who stole it, for example. It is important that the solution be believable. Authors must be sure to include all the clues necessary for finding the solution in the story somewhere (even if they are hidden very sneakily!).



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