

## THE MYSTERY NOVEL: An All-Purpose Exam

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Author \_\_\_\_\_ #Pgs \_\_\_\_\_

1. Write a newspaper article about the crime (or crimes) that occurred in the mystery you read. You may include appropriate quotes from the book, as if major characters were being interviewed by a reporter. Follow what is called “Inverted Pyramid Style.”

The first paragraph, called “the lead” will summarize all the main points by answering the 5 W’s and H -- Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? If this first paragraph seems too long, sometimes the lead facts are continued in a second paragraph.

Details that follow in the remaining paragraphs are in descending order -- from the most important to the least important -- just in case a newspaper runs out of space and has to chop off the last couple of paragraphs.

2. Write a one-paragraph character sketch of the central detective in your mystery. Certainly, mention appearance, but concentrate on personality, attitude, gestures, way of speaking, etc. Make every word count.

3. According to The Mystery Writers of America, a good mystery should meet the following criteria. Evaluate the mystery read, discussing specifically whether or not it meets each criterion.

- a. It should have positive moral value.
- b. It should involve the reader in puzzle solving.
- c. It should give complete consideration and treatment of the five W’s and H (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How) and leave none of these unsolved at the end.
- d. There should be no occult or fantastic solutions.
- e. Only one murderer or criminal should emerge at the end (suspicions of others, perhaps) and must be a main character (suspicions of minor characters all right).
- f. If a murder occurs, it must not prove to be death by a natural cause, real accident, or suicide in the end.
- g. The author must be honest with the reader, playing no tricks such as concealing evidence, etc. The reader must know everything the narrator knows.

4. Evaluate the mystery you read. Write a paragraph in which you explain why you would (or would not) recommend this book to other teenagers. Be specific about what you praise or condemn. Consider whether, you might recommend this book only to readers of a certain age or with special interests, etc.

5. Select one of the following quotes about mysteries and apply it to your selected text.

a. Ed McBain says: “For me, ‘hard-boiled’ means not turning away from a dead body and going into the hall to vomit. It means going into a morgue and smelling a stench that makes you want to wash your hands for days.”

b. In “The Simple Art of Murder,” Raymond Chandler’s description of the fictional American detective has the power of an ecclesiastical oath:

He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among the common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man’s money dishonestly and no man’s insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as the man of his age talks -- that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness.

c. Robert Parker wrote his Ph.D. thesis on the hard-boiled detective as the modern equivalent of the lonesome pioneer. Parker said, “When the wilderness disappeared at the end of the 19th century, the hero became a man, alone, facing an urban wilderness.”