

# Secrets, Lies and Alibis: A Guide to YA Mystery

By Alanna McLellan

The genre of mystery has really developed in YA literature in recent years. Readers of all ages have embraced such classics from the likes of Sir Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, to the more modern bestsellers like Dan Brown. With the immense popularity and success of Young Adult literature, we see how mystery as a genre has taken hold of this field. Particularly exciting for YA literature is the fact that readers are interested in a variety of takes on the genre; mystery is often accompanied by popular aspects of fantasy and the supernatural, thrillers, and historical fiction (Dickinson, 2013). The breadth of mystery stories within this guide demonstrates how YA novels continue to expand this genre. Several listed here show new takes on the classic detective story, or deal with contemporary social issues in realistic settings. Also expanding this genre is the variety of writing styles that authors use. They are embracing the idea of writing these stories through different types of perspective and tone to fully express timeless issues that every teen experiences like sexuality, love, family

and friendship. These are stories that can appeal to one in the mood for lighter fare, or others that take on a more serious and soul-searching kind of journey. From such a widely published genre, I wanted to ensure this guide offered something for everyone and appealed to the full spectrum of YA readers by having a good mix of gender amongst characters in the books, and stories which have interesting and dynamic relationships.

1. *Paper Towns* by John Green. 2009.

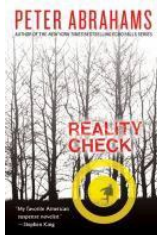


*Before *The Fault in Our Stars*, John Green wrote *Paper Towns*, which follows the story of Quentin, “Q”, as he pieces together clues to find out what has happened to Margo. Full of wit and truthfulness, fans of Green won’t be disappointed to ride along as Q and his friends embark on this emotional and unforgettable trip. Winner of the Edgar Award for Best Young Adult Mystery, and New York Times bestseller.*

Due to the current popularity of John Green, this slightly earlier work, *Paper Towns* also has great amount of appeal

to readers. With the movie adaptation and success of *The Fault in Our Stars*, it is easy to imagine a situation where someone may not have discovered his earlier works yet, or even a parent who was uncertain of what book to pick out for their teen; they may recognize the name John Green. He writes such honest relationships among young adults in this coming-of-age story, illustrating the difficulties that teen relationships can often have. In addition, this work illustrates equal representation of genders by offering a male protagonist perspective dealing with friendship and love.

2. *Reality Check* by Peter Abrahams. 2009.

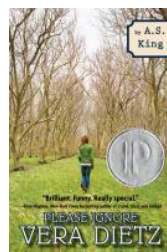


*Cody is the high school football star, but things take a turn when he injures himself, threatening his future college football career. It gets worse when he finds out his ex-girlfriend is now missing and he has the one potential clue to find out what happened to her. A gripping tale for readers, Abraham takes you on a journey with Cody as he tries to focus*

*on uncovering the truth when dreams and reality sometimes do not always line up.*

*Reality Check* features an interesting male, Cody, as the main character. He exemplifies the type of typical teen who does not see school as a priority and focuses mainly on sports. This novel is included because it deals with many common hardships: the pressure of performance in sports and academics, the prospect of what the future holds, figuring out one's own identity and the idea of believing more in yourself can reveal new things you did not know before. For male readers who typically do not read often, this protagonist and story will be appealing and relatable.

3. *Please Ignore Vera Dietz* by A.S. King. 2010.



*Life is hard for Vera after losing her best friend Charlie when the local pet shop burned down. Knowing that there is something suspicious about her friend's death, she must decide if she wants to reveal the facts that could clear his name – things that only she knows.*

*Dealing with some dark and difficult issues, A.S. King unfolds this unique narrative through flashbacks and notes, bringing a thrilling and edgy novel full of heartbreak to readers. This book was a Michael L. Printz Honor Book in 2011.*

This book is included because of the unique complexity in which the story is told. It deals with dark issues many young adults have to manage including abuse of alcohol, bad relationships, and bullying, in addition to dealing with personal emotions and morals about life's events. Vera is a very intriguing character, and the incorporation of such difficult themes within a mystery thriller made this book an excellent choice to include on this list. As part of the novel's focus, the dynamic of male-female friendship is also great at expressing social issues that can challenge such relationships during a teen's years.

4. *A Spy in the House* by Y.S. Lee. 2010.

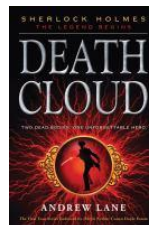


*Book One of this exciting series by Canadian author Y.S. Lee features an orphan named Mary who has to rely on*

*her wits and quick-thinking after she becomes part of an all-female detective agency. Pretending to be a lady's companion, Mary must figure out the workings of a town merchant's estate without revealing her true identity. An intriguing and quick-paced plot will have you cheering for the underdog as she battles the daily constraints of Victorian society. Winner of the John Spray Mystery Award in 2011.*

The Agency series would appeal to those who enjoy an action-adventure type of mystery, similar to the appeal of the classic Sherlock Holmes. In this case, Mary has had to overcome a rough childhood and bad situations before even going undercover. It is an enjoyable representation of a strong female character in nineteenth-century England and the journey to accepting her own diversity, a timely topic for enhancing the YA voice.

5. *Young Sherlock Holmes: Death Cloud* by Andrew Lane. 2010.



*Death Cloud is the first in a series of novels depicting a teenaged Sherlock*

*Holmes. Sherlock quickly finds himself thrown into a mystery with the sudden death of two local town members. Both new and old readers will enjoy getting to know the beloved detective as a teen. This adventure is full of fun and action-packed curiosity and sinister villains.*

By introducing the famous Sherlock Holmes as a teen, a new audience of young adults can experience the joys of Holmes and his famous ways of detection. It can appeal to a wide-ranging audience: those who already know of Sherlock and like it as a classic, as well as this new generation of people who are not as familiar with the original works by Doyle. While appealing for any young adults, this action-packed adventure can be especially entertaining for teen boys, who tend to be reluctant readers, and the character of Sherlock would be recognizable for parents in a situation where they happen to be on the search for something to borrow for their teen. The author also does a great job of incorporating aspects that are educational as young Sherlock learns from his tutor which aids him to solve the mystery. Another positive aspect of this novel is how they incorporate a female character, Virginia, as an intelligent friend and develop Sherlock's relationship with her as a way to relate

many familiar social issues teens deal with on a daily basis.

6. *The Last Little Blue Envelope* by Maureen Johnson. 2011.

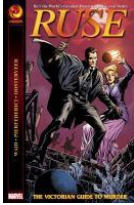


*After spending last summer travelling and following the notes left by her Aunt Peg, Ginny thought she would never find out what happened to the last little blue envelope. When a stranger sends her an email saying he has the envelope, she embarks on another adventure. A quick and delightful read with a dash of romance, travel and fun.*

This book is engaging but a quick read for those who were not interested in dealing with more dark and troubling topics as others. The incorporation of this sequel is an example of slightly lighter fare for the teen who wants a nice and adventurous read. Johnson also makes great connections of the main character and her relationships to express the themes of love and family. This is a fun read for teens as they begin to develop a sense of broadening their horizons. The idea of wanderlust for travel becomes more prominent in

some teens' minds, which may also appeal to those who read this book.

7. *Ruse. The Victorian guide to murder*, [Graphic Novel] by Mark Waid, illustrated by Mirco Pierfederici et al. 2011.

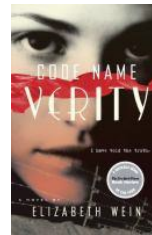


*From Marvel Comics comes the revived series of Ruse, a graphic novel about one of the best detectives around, Simon Archard, and his equally quick-witted partner, Emma Bishop. This will appeal to avid graphic novel readers looking for a non-caped crusader adventure and those new to the format. Witty banter and riveting adventures will have readers enjoying the unfolding of this Victorian mystery.*

Incorporating this graphic novel provides an option for mature teens who do not find novels appealing. The story is well-developed with its inclusion of both male and female main characters that are treated as equals by one another. In addition, it also provides an interesting non-Superhero graphic adventure. This could allow for those who read graphic novels all the time to try something new, but still in a format they enjoy. It could

pique the interest of those who do not traditionally read the typical male-dominated graphic novel as a fun introduction to this type of storytelling. The story also includes accurate Victorian Age details, a fun and educational aspect for those who like historical fiction.

8. *Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein. 2012.

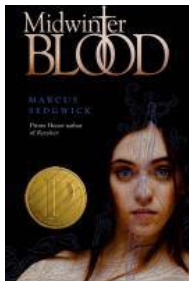


*After a plane crashes in Nazi-occupied France, Verity tries to keep secrets hidden while striving to survive. Beginning with Verity's own account of events, this novel is full of bravery, suspense and espionage. Full of rich detail and descriptions, Code Name Verity will transport you back in time, reminding you just how powerful and timeless friendship can be. The novel won the 2013 Michael L. Printz Honor Book, the Edgar Allan Poe Award, and the Golden Kite Honor in 2013.*

This book has received great amounts of praise; it is a different way to express mystery and another great example of historical fiction. The narrative by Wein

is also exceptional, and an interesting way to keep readers on their toes and learn new ways to remember clues in their minds. The book shows a strong portrayal of friendship, and how powerful it can be between two people. In addition, it is important to include a book that deals with broader social issues, such as the fact that not everybody comes from the same place, or had the same childhood (as seen with the two main characters) and that people can become friends beyond their differences. It is very well-crafted in its historical detail, and could be a captivating way to learn about historical events that teens in this age group would be studying about in school.

9. *Midwinterblood* by Marcus Sedgewick. 2013.

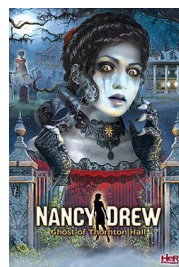


*Midwinterblood* consists of seven short stories that are carefully crafted to connect to each other. Beginning in the future of 2073, a journalist named Eric arrives on Blessed Island, a strange and chilling village. Readers will be mesmerized by the stories that are

*woven together. It is perfect for those wanting to read a different collection of stories. Midwinterblood* will have you trying to connect the dots as you travel through each short story. Winner of the 2014 Michael L. Printz Award.

*Midwinterblood* is a unique work of short story fiction which is an interesting departure from straightforward fictional mysteries. It challenges the reader to try and solve the mysterious connections between the stories. In addition, it is deliciously dark at times; it appeals to the popular trends of vampires and Vikings, as well as demonstrating how relationships of love can be represented through a variety of ways between two people.

10. *Nancy Drew: Ghost of Thornton Hall* [Computer Game] by Her Interactive. 2013.



*In this adventure-mystery game, Nancy Drew finds herself visiting an abandoned island to investigate the paranormal disappearance of a young woman. A detective classic, this game will have players not wanting to stop until they*

*have discovered all the secrets by interrogating suspects and completing missions in order to solve the mystery. Great for those wanting to solve intricate thinking puzzles as well as relive the joy of Nancy Drew's sleuthing skills.*

Many teens have probably graduated from the Nancy Drew/Hardy Boys series, but this computer series is full of fun. These games are produced by Her Interactive, a company which strives to create games that would appeal to girls who typically are not as active in the computer/video game platform and potentially those who are still fans of the classic girl detective. This has been incredibly successful; the series has sold millions of games and continues to produce about two games a year (Her Interactive, 2015). Even though it is rated E for everyone, each game has suspenseful moments and from personal experience, the activities in the game are hard enough for some adults to be challenged, but it would be a great computer activity for the younger set of the YA age. This is a great example of a non-reading electronic material which still has an engaging story.

11. *Jackaby* [Audiobook], by William Ritter, read by Nicola Barber. 2014.



*On the eve of the 20th century, a quick-witted detective meets his new assistant Abigail Rook, and together they take upon elements of the paranormal and extraordinary to find out who – or in their case what – is on the loose as a serial killer of New England. A quick read, lovers of fantasy, the supernatural with touches of humour will read away the layers of this new mystery novel.*

*Jackaby* is another entertaining mystery that has a dynamic duo as its two main characters. It also has more aspects of fantasy, folklore, and the supernatural mixed in with the mystery which would appeal to a number of teens today and exemplifies how expansive the mystery genre is in YA literature today. Also enjoyable is the use of more cheeky humour woven throughout the narrative, and that both characters have unique skills which they soon find out are helpful to have and use. This audiobook edition of *Jackaby* includes some entertaining accents which make this story come to life.

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