

Some Good Middle School Mysteries!

There are many kinds of mysteries – creepy, humorous, solve-it-yourself, etc. – and one of the best and most interesting things about introducing students to the great mystery megagenre is to watch them discover which type or types they will enjoy the most!

Here is a list of some suggestions. Of course, this is just a tiny sample of the huge number of mysteries available to readers of middle school age. Feel free to look for other sources of titles – perhaps at your public library – and if you yourself love mysteries, consider sharing some of your own favorites with your student, then discussing them!

Avi: **Something Upstairs**. A ghost mystery set in Providence, R.I., focusing on the early 19th-century murder of a teenaged slave.

Balliett, Blue: **Chasing Vermeer** and sequels. Mystery thrillers with an art history twist.

Barnett, Mac: The **Brixton Brothers** series. Fun, campy, and adventurous!

Beck, W.H.: **Malcolm at Midnight**. Malcolm is a classroom pet – a rat – who is blamed by the other classroom pets when one of their own goes missing, and must solve the mystery to clear his name (and prove that rats are not bad by nature).

Bellairs, John: **The House with a Clock in Its Walls**. This very creepy supernatural mystery has become a classic.

Bloor, Edward: **Tangerine**. A boy uses a move to a new community to delve into his dark family history, and to break free from the secrets that kept him from pursuing his own dreams.

Boyce, Frank: **Framed**. A number of mysteries, some serious and some humorous, focus on a small Welsh town and a down-on-their-luck family. A very witty and enjoyable book, particularly good for reading aloud.

Doder, Joshua: **A Dog Called Grk** and sequels. Mystery/adventures with plenty of weirdness.

Dowd, Siobhan: **The London Eye Mystery**. Two young sleuths must solve the mystery of their cousin's disappearance.

Erickson, John: The **Hank the Cowdog** series. Hank is quite a character, and the mysteries he solves are never quite what he thinks they are – which adds a wonderful element of humor.

Grabenstein, Chris: **The Crossroads: A Haunted Mystery**. This recent mystery about an angry ghost is particularly recommended for unenthusiastic readers.

Griffin, Peni: **The Ghost Sitter**. An excellent short ghost mystery about a dead girl who, even “from the beyond”, gives comfort to living babies and toddlers.

- Hamilton, Virginia: **The House of Dies Drear**. A mystery about a supposedly haunted house, with hidden rooms and an unexpected history.
- Mahy, Margaret: **The Haunting**. Set in New Zealand. A boy is haunted, and gradually family secrets come out.
- Miller, Kirsten: The **Kiki Strike** series. For the more ambitious, this very popular series focuses on a set of “delinquent geniuses” who find themselves solving mysteries.
- Raskin, Ellen: **The Westing Game**. This Newbery Medal winning mystery is considered a classic. It keeps its characters *and* its readers guessing!
- Riddell, Chris: **Ottoline and the Yellow Cat**. Ottoline is a girl living by herself with a strange hairy guardian. In this first book of the series, she is mixed up in the criminal schemes of the mysterious yellow cat. Lots of very detailed illustrations. This would be a good entry into the mystery genre for a reluctant student.
- Sleator, William: **Others See Us**. When Jared suddenly gains the power to read minds, he realizes that things in his family are not as they seem.
- Sobol, Donald: **The Encyclopedia Brown series**. These classics have become such a part of American culture that every child should read at least a few of the self-contained chapters some time in his/her school life, and some children will want to read them all.
- Summy, Barrie: **I So Don’t Do Mysteries**. Sherry, a screwball seventh-grader with no particular interest in sleuthing, is contacted by the ghost of her police officer mother, who needs Sherry to solve a mystery. Convuluted and entertaining.
- Turnage, Sheila: **Three Times Lucky**. Mo LeBeau lives in the small (fictional) town of Tupelo Landing, NC, where she makes everything her business. This entertaining Newbery Honor book requires some maturity, as it deals in part with issues like domestic violence.
- Van Draanen, Wendelin: The **Shredderman** series. A fine series of school mysteries, fast-paced and very accessible, even for students who might not be that interested in the genre.
- Van Draanen, Wendelin: The **Sammy Keyes** series. This fine series of mysteries is a little too sophisticated for younger readers, but will appeal to middle schoolers, especially those who already like mysteries.

What about those old favorites, **Nancy Drew** and **Hardy Boys**? If you think your child will like them, by all means try them, especially if you loved them yourself. Many of them are period pieces now – rumble seats! Bobbed hair! Chloroform on rags! Consider discussing how they are different from modern mysteries.

I would be very interested to hear what our students thought of any of these mysteries!

Sincerely,
Teacher McKenzie