

## Crime Fiction

### Before Reading

- Which TV programs or movies about crime do you like to watch?
- What do you like or dislike about crime fiction?
- Why do you think most people like crime stories?

Crime fiction is an extremely popular literary genre, one that is often transformed into TV shows or movies. These stories are often about the investigation of a crime and its motives. Crime fiction has many subgenres, such as detective and spy novels, courtroom dramas, suspense and mystery. Crime fiction seems modern only because the stories are never static; they change with the conventions of the times.

Authors of crime fiction or other genres sometimes write novels and short stories very quickly in order to keep **income** flowing, or “to keep the pot boiling.” Called “**potboilers**,” they are not usually very successful, but on occasion they may wind up on the best-seller list or be made into movies that become **blockbusters**. The stories may contain violence, which is often directed against a spy or detective. There’s often a femme fatale who attempts to help or distracts the detective from his work.

Crime fiction is known for its fascinating stories. Novels that tell stories that are so exciting that it is difficult to stop reading them are called **page-turners**. In English, detective stories are also known as “**whodunits**” (who has done it). In Italy, crime novels are called **giallo** (yellow), because the cover of these books has been yellow since the 1930s. In French, they are called **polar** (pol for “police” + suffix -ar). *Giallo* and *polar* are the equivalent of the English *whodunit*.

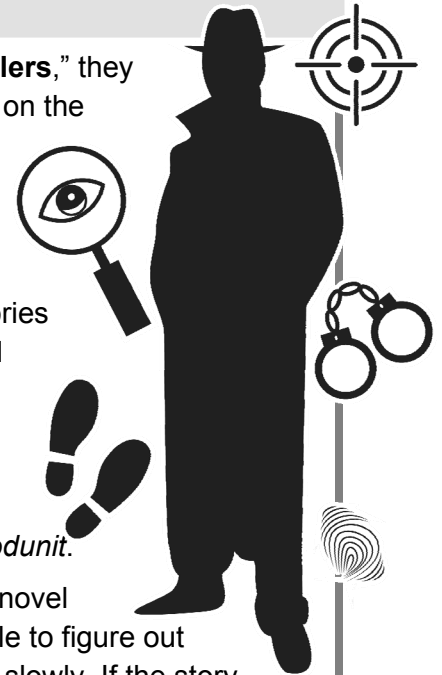
Detective stories follow specific patterns, but at the centre of each novel is the investigator. He or she often works with a friend who is unable to figure out who committed the crime. The clues to solving the crime are given slowly. If the story is well told, the reader is unable to guess the identity of the criminal, or the motives involved, until the very end.

Edgar Allan Poe is credited with introducing the first detective character, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. The crime novels written before usually ended when the crime was committed. Poe started with the criminal act and the solving of the crime became the story. Poe’s fictional detective was called C. Auguste Dupin.

### While Reading

*Activate prior knowledge*

- Think of novels, TV, movies, etc. How many fictional detectives or spies can you name?
- Who is your favourite detective or spy?
- Name any subgenres in crime fiction you know.
- Who was the first literary detective?
- Who is your favourite crime writer? Why?



**income**  
money earned, profit

**blockbuster**  
a movie that is very popular and makes a lot of money

Vocabulary

The eccentric Dupin became the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Like Dupin, Holmes lived a solitary life, coming out only to solve crime. Another descendant of Dupin was Hercule Poirot. This short, Belgian detective was created by Dame Agatha Christie. Poirot wore elegant clothes and a small, recognizable, waxed moustache. He solved crimes using his *little grey cells*. Poirot was often helped by Captain Hastings, who also narrated the stories, much like Dr. Watson.

The **Golden Age** of the detective novel is considered to be between 1920 and 1940. The Queen of Detective Fiction for this period is surely Agatha Christie. She wrote 66 mysteries, 6 novels, 150 short stories, 18 plays and 2 memoirs. Her work has been translated into more than 100 languages. Her books have sold more than 2 billion copies. This is exceeded only by the Bible and the works of Shakespeare. Agatha Christie died in 1976.



Portrait of Hercule Poirot

Modern crime fiction is usually **gritty and tough**. Both spies and detectives tend to be more anti-authoritarian and antisocial than in the past. They solve crimes as they drive and shoot their way through books and movies. Think of successful movie series, such as *Dirty Harry*, *Die Hard* or *Bourne*. The main characters are often caught up in the same web of espionage and violence as the criminals they chase. Modern writers do not always justify murder, making their stories as dark as the crimes themselves. Solving the crime is still at the heart of the stories, which remain firmly rooted in the realities and uncertainties of the 21st century.

The contemporary Queen of Crime is indisputably P. D. James. She gave us one of the first professional female detectives, Cordelia Gray. James' stories have strong narratives, while the investigators, criminals and their various motives are psychologically very complex.

Another popular crime writer is Canadian Louise Penny. She has introduced Armand Gamache, a detective from the Sûreté du Québec. There are similarities to Poirot and Maigret, but Gamache is a **true-blue** original. Penny has often been compared to P. D. James and Donna Leon. Like them, Penny uses her characters and crime stories to explore the complexities of human relations.

A possible explanation for the success of crime novels is that they may help us understand the violence in our modern world. They may also give us hope that evil will not go unpunished and that order will win over chaos.

What will the future of crime fiction be?

A good guess is that crime fiction will remain very popular and **eminently downloadable**.

**gritty and tough**

persistent, unpleasant, courageous, realistic, strong, aggressive

**true-blue**

loyal and faithful to an idea or a person

**eminently**

extremely, very much

**downloadable**

to move or to download data from a large computer

### After Reading

Answer the following questions with a complete sentence.

**1** Who was Agatha Christie?

***She was the Queen of Detective Fiction/a detective fiction writer.***

**2** Which books are more popular than Agatha's Christie books?

***The books are the Bible and the works of Shakespeare.***

**3** Why is crime fiction never static?

***Crime fiction changes with the conventions of the times.***

**4** Why is Captain Hastings compared to Dr. Watson?

***They both narrate the crime-solving stories of their friends, Poirot and Sherlock Holmes.***

### Who or What Am I?

Read the words on the left. Then match them with the phrases on the right. Write the number in the space provided.

<i>Example:</i> Dr. Watson	11	1. Canadian novelist
a) Bourne	5	2. Belgian investigator
b) <i>Giallo</i>	8	3. American novelist
c) Poirot	2	4. Antisocial investigator
d) Cordelia Gray	7	5. American spy character
e) Louise Penny	1	6. Queen of Crime
f) Donna Leon	9	7. First female investigator
g) Dirty Harry	4	8. Italian for "crime novel"
h) Edgar Allan Poe	3	9. Crime writer
i) Captain Hastings	10	10. Poirot's narrator
j) P. D. James	6	11. Holmes's friend

**True or False**

Read the sentences below. Put an X under True or False. If it is false, write the correct answer in a complete sentence.

	True	False	Correct Answer
<i>Example:</i> Crime fiction novels are classics; they always remain the same.		X	They change with the conventions of the time.
a) Crime fiction is very popular.	X		_____
b) There is only one name for detective novels.		X	<b><i>They are also known as whodunits, giallo and polar.</i></b>
c) Another word for detective is investigator.	X		_____
d) The Golden Age is a story by Agatha Christie.		X	<b><i>It is a time period.</i></b>
e) Agatha Christie is the creator of Hercule Poirot.	X		_____
f) Detective stories are recent additions to crime fiction.		X	<b><i>They are quite old.</i></b>
g) Hercule Poirot likes to dress well.	X		_____
h) Crime fiction has two subgenres.		X	<b><i>According to the text, it has five.</i></b>
i) A potboiler is the equivalent of a polar.		X	<b><i>A polar is the equivalent of a whodunit.</i></b>
j) Armand Gamache is a Quebec detective.	X		_____
k) Potboilers are written quickly with the intention of making money.	X		_____
l) Page-turners are fast-paced detective stories.	X		_____

**On Your Own: The Detective’s Guide to Observation**

You are a private detective. You have been asked by the police chief to observe your “suspect” in detail. Complete the information below. Report to the class and see if they can guess the identity of your “suspect.” **Answers will vary.**

My name is Police Detective \_\_\_\_\_

My suspect is known by these aliases (false names): \_\_\_\_\_

He/she is often seen at (place): \_\_\_\_\_

His/her face is (*square, oval, round, triangular, heart-shaped, etc.*): \_\_\_\_\_

His/her skin is (*rosy, fair, tanned, pale, baby-soft, brown, rough, etc.*): \_\_\_\_\_

His/her eyes are (*black, brown, hazel, small, almond-shaped, etc.*): \_\_\_\_\_

His/her mouth and lips are (*thin, full, kind, serious, cruel, etc.*): \_\_\_\_\_

His/her hair is (*brown, blond, black, straight, curly, etc.*): \_\_\_\_\_

He/she is wearing (*jeans, skirt, shorts, shirt, T-shirt, hoodie, dress, blouse, socks, shoes, running shoes, sandals, etc.*) (patterns: *striped, floral, lacy, black, gold, silver, leather, sparkly etc.*) (accessories: *earrings, bracelets, watch, cap, necklace, rings, scarf, bag, etc.*):  
\_\_\_\_\_

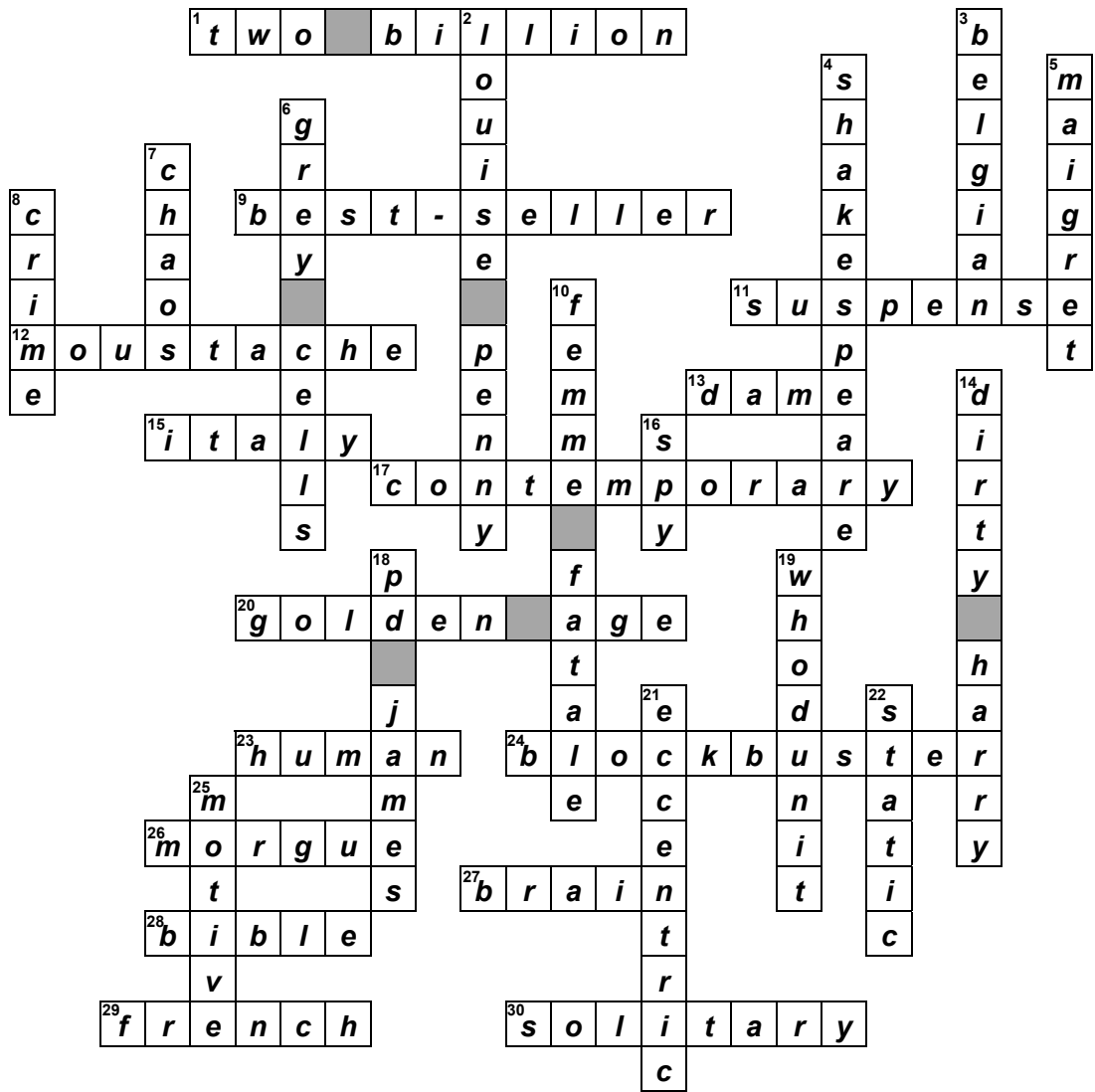
His/her frequent companions are (names of his/her friends): \_\_\_\_\_

My suspect is: \_\_\_\_\_



**Crossword Puzzle**

The answers to the crossword puzzle are in the text: Crime Fiction.



**Across**

1. Two thousand million (two words)
9. Very popular book
11. Another word for thriller
12. Hair over the lip
13. Aristocratic title for A. Christie
15. European peninsula
17. Synonym for modern
20. Literary time period (2 words)
23. Author Louise Penny explores these types of relations.
24. Very popular movie
26. Crime committed on this street (6 letters)
27. Grey cells
28. Holy Book
29. Native of France
30. He lived this type of life.

**Down**

2. International crime writer (2 words)
3. Native of Belgium
4. He wrote *Romeo and Juliet*.
5. French detective
6. I use them to solve crimes. (2 words)
7. Opposite of order
8. Another word for murder
10. Beautiful but dangerous woman (2 words)
14. American movie detective (2 words)
16. James Bond is one.
18. She writes complex characters.
19. English word for detective story
21. Adjective describing Dupin
22. Never changes
25. Reason for crime