Mind--bending Mysteries and Thrillers for Teens: A programming and readers' advisory guide.

Amy J. Alessio

ALA Editions

Chicago

1 Volume

ISBN 978 0 8389 1204 1

Keywords: Young adults’ libraries, Teenagers - Books and reading, Young adult literature - Bibliography, Detective and mystery stories - Bibliography, Readers’ advisory services.

Amy J. Alessio is a teen librarian, who has served two terms on the YALSA board of directors, and was the first recipient of the Young Adult Librarian of the Year Award from the Illinois Library Association.

This volume is organized into two parts. The first part, approximately half of the book, describes different subgroups within the larger mystery genre and deals with readers’ advisory. Alessio offers suggestions for some basic questions that a librarian can ask a young reader to assist with readers’ advisory, and then breaks down the various subgenres of mystery into categories that will appeal to teens. These categories are 1. Realistic Mysteries, 2. High-Tech Whodunits, 3. Thrillers, 4. Fantastic and Paranormal Mysteries, 5. Mysteries in Time and Place, and 6. Romantic Suspense. Many of the well known adult mysteries fall into these, but they’ve been named in such a way as to make it easier to sort out a teenager’s interests. i.e. Dashiell Hammett writes realistic mysteries, as opposed to calling them “hard boiled”, a categorization better known to adult readers.

Each of her categories is further broken down into subcategories that address the teen reader on an even more specific level. For example, the Realistic Mystery category, is further broken down into, Undaunted Detectives, Accused Teens, Disappearing Family and Friends, Small Town Sleuths, Humorous Inspectors or What’s so Funny About Crime, and Sporty Sleuths. Alessio does this for each category, and additionally provides recommended bibliography in that subcategory, adult mysteries that may appeal to teens, and ideas for Booktalking and Covert Marketing within that subgenre.

The second half of the book is devoted to teen library programming for mystery readers, and her chapter titles tell a pretty clear story. Using Clues to Match Teen Interests, mysterious programming, has ten complete program suggestions with all the preparation and activities mapped out in detail. There are also online programming options, and alternatives for when cost is a consideration (i.e. the final program which is an hour long, interactive mystery dinner.) The programs are so well crafted, and easily organized that any library, no matter the size, should be able to implement them. They also range in length from 1 hour, to a 9 month school year reading incentive program, to a weekly recurring event. Grade level recommendations are provided along with the number of participants that each program can comfortably accomodate.

Mind Bending Mystery Club Activities covers how to gauge interest in a teen mystery club, begin organizing, and start meetings. Suggestions include giving each participant a message in code when they arrive, starting with a simple substitution code (1=A, 2=B, etc.) and making the codes more complex as the program progresses. The participants can work on the code while they munch on snacks, which are always a good icebreaker and meeting starter. Alessio suggests 8 different topics for clubs, and two different trivia contests. The ideas presented should be enough to get any mystery club off the ground, and provide fodder for future ideas.

When Book Discussions get Mysterious begins by acknowledging that book discussion can often seem like just so much more assigned reading to a teenager, and follows with a suggestion to begin discussion online or offer discussions with a theme to get younger readers interested. Alessio gives 10 suggested books, 1 to match each subgenre, and each with a review & a set of 10 discussion questions.

It’s no Mystery to Market is the shortest chapter in the book, but fills its 3 pages with some of the most clever marketing suggestions this reviewer has seen. The idea of hiding a bookmark in the teen collection offering a prize to the one who brings it to the circulation desk, or offering events in the form of puzzles seems like a great way to market mystery books.

The final 15 pages of the book are devoted to three appendices of bibliography. 1. Titles and Series by Genre and Subgenre, 2. Titles and Series by Author, and 3. Mysteries in Graphic Novel Format.

I would rate this book as a fantastic value. It is a very well written, thought out, and organized title that feels like an essential part of any young adult librarian’s toolkit. Highly recommended for any public library, school library or media center, or any homeschooling parents.