



JANICE THOMPSON, AUTHOR

# Adding Mystery Elements

 0 Comments

# MYSTERY

If you want to add mystery elements to your novel, consider these "cozy" additions:

## COZY CRIME SOLVERS: The Amateur Sleuth



The amateur cozy sleuth gathers clues by listening to gossip, and by paying attention to the activities around her. She relies on her understanding of human nature, her natural nosiness, and her personality to help her gather her clues. She is seldom taken seriously by the police, her boyfriend or spouse, or anyone else, although best friends are sometimes supportive.

## COZY COMMUNITY: Small Town Feel

While Agatha Christie popularized the small English village as a setting, cozies can take place anywhere. Typically, a cozy has a small setting so that the pool of suspects is limited and relationships can be developed. Since the main character does not usually have access to forensic laboratories, the solution of the crime depends on talking to characters who all know each other. For the sake of simplicity, you may decide to set your cozy wherever you live. If that happens to be a bustling city, shrink the scope to focus on a single apartment building or workplace.

## COZY CHARACTERS: Quirky Primary and Secondary

## Characters

Supporting characters in a cozy can be eccentric, exasperating, or entertaining. They don't have to be likeable but none should be so outrageously evil that they might cause the reader to stop reading. These people include the suspects (of whom the criminal is actually one), innocent bystanders, and those who may help the main character.

## COZY CRIMINALS: Viable Suspects with True

### Motivation

The criminal in a cozy is usually motivated by human traits of greed, jealousy, or revenge. You won't find many serial or thrill killers in cozies. The criminal may commit a second crime during the story but again any violence should take place between the lines and not on the page.

## COZY COPS: Suspending Disbelief

Then there are the cops. In real life, the police would seal off the murder scene and run the investigation. Cozy readers will accept that not happening so long as you give them the slightest reason for suspending their disbelief. Perhaps bad weather is keeping the police at bay or the entire department is off on a team-building exercise. (Think Barney Fife here.)

## INCITING INCIDENT: Non-Graphic & Often Off-stage

Early on and often off-stage, the precipitating crime either occurs before the story starts or soon after it begins. The main character becomes involved (happily or not) and sets out to solve the injustice. Think about the movie, *The Fugitive* (a

thriller/suspense). The opening scene is graphic and scary. In a cozy, you'd never have an opening scene like that.

## **RED HERRINGS: Sending the Reader Down the Wrong Trail...Fairly**

Red herrings (apparent clues which distract the reader) may be included and all the suspects might appear guilty along the way.

## **TWISTS AND TURNS: Puzzles to be Solved**

The cozy is often a puzzle where all the pieces are available for assembly, even if the one which points at the killer needs to be flipped or examined more closely. As the sleuth gathers clues and gossip, there may be a threat which increases tension. There may also be fear that a second crime might occur, and it might. Think about a real puzzle—you don't cram the pieces.

## **COZY SOLUTIONS: WHO-DUNNIT?**

The cozy is not an amusement park ride as much as it is an examination of human frailty. Instead of unexpected plot twists, cozies are known for surprising revelations.

In the end, the main character—and justice—prevail. Confusion should be resolved in the end. The missing candlestick was taken by a child for a school project; the averted glance which suggested guilt actually represented guilt for snacking at midnight.

**By JThompson**  
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