

What a SCREAM!

▶ MYSTERIES AND SCARY STORIES

Who doesn't love a good mystery? Invite your students to create, write, and share mysteries and scary stories. Both genres encourage students to use language to communicate effectively. Whodunnit capers help develop problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.



—John Ueland

introduce the genre

A **mystery** is a suspense-filled story that contains a puzzle that needs to be solved. Readers often have to follow clues, make predictions, and draw conclusions about the ending of the story. American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) is credited with developing the first detective story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Mysteries allow students to develop two essential elements of storytelling—**setting** and **plot**. Mystery writers must know where their story will go before they put pen to paper.

“I’ll get you, my pretty ... and your little dog too!”

—the Wicked Witch of the West, *The Wizard of Oz*

spark creativity: story starters

Use the “Cook Up a Good Setting” and “Map Your Story” reproducibles to help your students to write suspense stories.

Make a Word Web. Create a word web to describe your setting, such as a mysterious house. Then let the words flow—*footsteps, howling wind, creaks, cobwebs*, and so on.

Clue In the Reader. What clues do your characters use to solve the mystery? What plot twists happen? How is the mystery resolved? If you’re stuck, try this: *On my way home from a friend’s house, I got lost in the woods and then ...*

Picture Your Setting. Cut out a picture from a magazine and use it as your setting. Your detailed description of the image can serve as the beginning of your story.

Share Your Story. Turn off the lights. Pull down the shades. Close the doors. Then grab a flashlight and read your story aloud to another person. Stop before the ending to see if your listener can predict what will happen.

WRITING TIP: Use ‘What ifs?’

Writing a story doesn’t have to be scary. Children’s author R. L. Stine uses “What ifs?” for ideas. His book *The Nightmare Room #4: Liar Liar* is based on the scenario “What if you had an exact double?” Write as many “What ifs?” as you can think of in five minutes. Then use one as a springboard for a mystery story.