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### Female Mystery Writers With Strong Leading Ladies

Edgar Allan Poe is the writer who got me started reading when I was in middle school. Up until that point, I only read books that were assigned, of which I got no enjoyment. My teacher assigned the class poems that we had to recite in front of the class; I was assigned Poe's *The Raven*. Upon reading Poe's poem, I must confess that I was instantly hooked; I never read such a macabre and haunting poem. I read his biography and all his short stories. I was captivated by *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, not only did I not, at the time, read such grotesque descriptions of murder, but I had to know who committed such a heinous crime; the good thing was, it was a short story and I was able to find whodunit in a short amount of time. From this point on, I was hooked on mysteries.

Poe to this day excites me and is the sole reason why I chose the genre of mystery. While reading a mystery, I try to decipher who, and why they committed the crime, of course there are plenty of red herrings that try to lead the reader away from the assailant. The annotated bibliographies that I chose are books written by authors who either won or were nominated for the Edgar Allan Poe Award, which has been awarded since 1948. According to many people, Edgar Allan Poe has long been acknowledged as the "Father of the Detective Story". Each year in April, Mystery Writers of America, which is the American organization of mystery writers,

awards author whose work is worthy of such an award (Information taken from <http://www.mysterynet.com/edgars/about/>).

I chose my books on the basis that the author is female and the protagonist is also female. I believe that young girls, who tend to be quite impressionable, should be introduced to female protagonists that are courageous and intelligent, who are not beholden to societal mores and use any means at their disposal to solve their crime. I also like the fact that these girls (characters) are not superhuman, but rather average in their home life and abilities. They represent what a girl can achieve if she puts her mind to a problem and uses all her assets to solve it.

#### Annotated Bibliographies

- 1) Berry, Julie. *All the Truth That's In Me*. New York: Viking Juvenile. 2013. Print.

Judith and her friend disappeared four years ago from the small town of Roswell Station. Two years later, only Judith returned, but is permanently mutilated and is shunned by those that were once her friends and family. Judith, unable to speak, lives her life like a ghost, that is until Roswell Station is attacked again; Judith must decide to remain silent or recover her voice, even if it means that it will alter her life and the lives of those around her. (Summary taken from <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/17297487-all-the-truth-that-s-in-me>)

*All the Truth That's In Me* is the 2014 Edgar Award winner. This book is for the reader who is 13+. Its central themes focus on issues of isolation, persecution and fear and abuse of authority. I feel that many students could sympathize with Judith and for some; it might give them the courage to speak up.

- 2) Chandler, Elizabeth. *Don't Tell (Dark Secrets)*. New York: Pocket Books. 2001. Print

Seven years after her famous mother's death, Lauren returned home. Her death was an accident but some thought it was murder. Lauren is returning home to see her godmother, Aunt Jule. When Lauren gets to Aunt Jules' home, is it surprisingly run down. Aunt Jule is acting strangely and her daughters have changed also. Lauren's childhood friend Nick is suddenly hostile to Lauren and drawn to her cousin Holly. Some nasty "accidents" makes Lauren realize that she is in danger. This time, there's no place to run. (Summary taken from <http://www.amazon.com/Dont-Tell-Secrets-Elizabeth-Chandler-ebook/dp/B003GFIWIS>)

This book was a nominee in 2002 for the Edgar Award and it will keep readers intrigued. Lauren's mother drowned and now Lauren might be next. She is staying with her godmother Aunt Jules, who turns out to be more than just a godmother. Aunt Jules' daughters also hold secrets, Nora might quite possibly be mentally disturbed and Holly, who is obsessed with money has her own agenda. This book can teach young adults that people are not what they may seem to be and to trust their gut.

3) MacCready, Robin Merrow. *Buried*. New York: Dutton Juvenile. 2006. Print.

Claudine has her needs aside to help take care of her alcoholic mother. When her mom disappears, her own darkness is waiting to be uncovered. When things are at their worst, she must find the truth in a shallow grave on the family's property. (Summary taken from <http://www.amazon.com/Buried-Robin-Merrow-MacCready/dp/0525477241>)

This book deals with issues that many teens are facing, an alcoholic parent who depends too much on the child, instead of supporting their child. Claudine has had to grow up too quickly and now must face her own demons that resulted from her incompetent mother. In order for Claudine to uncover the dark truth, she must first look into herself. This book is not only a

psychological thriller, it can serve as an inspirational work for those who are affected and scarred by alcoholism in their families. This book was the 2007 winner of the Edgar Award.

- 4) Mackall, Dandi Daley. *The Silence of Murder*. New York: Knopf Book For Young Readers. 2011. Print

Hope Long, who is seventeen, finds out that her beloved older brother, Jeremy is accused of murder. Everyone is convinced that Jeremy did it and his lone supporter is Hope, who must now prove her brother's innocence. Hope, with the help of the sheriff's son, Chase, both uncover secrets about the murder, the townspeople, her family and even about herself. She knows that her brother is not the killer but as she gets closer to the truth, she is terrified to find who is.

(Summary taken from <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10424929-the-silence-of-murder>)

*The Silence of Murder* was the 2012 winner of the Edgar Award. This is the story of a brave young girl who knows that her beloved brother Jeremy is not a killer and it is up to her to prove it. Since the murder, Jeremy has refused to speak, even in his own defense. There are several red herrings, which is a classic trait of a good mystery.

- 5) Mitchell, Sandra. *Shadowed Summer*. New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers. 2009. Print

In the sleepy town of Ondine, Louisiana, nothing seems to happen. Even when Elijah Landry disappeared, it was believed that he either ran away or was murdered. Much later, fourteen year old Iris Rhame wants to find out what happened to the "Landry Boy" after she saw his ghost in the cemetery. With her friend Collette and her annoying boyfriend Ben, Iris spends the summer searching for the truth about Elijah. What she does realize is that every small

town has its secrets and every secret is a family secret. (Summary taken from <http://www.amazon.com/Shadowed-Summer-Sandra-Mitchell/dp/B006CDQP94>)

If you like a good ghost story mystery, then this is the book to read. It was a 2010 Edgar Award nominee. It has ghosts, an unsolved disappearance or possibly murder and secrets. Iris is a typical girl that likes to hang out with her friends in a spooky cemetery telling scary stories and pretending to cast spells, every summer is it the same that is until this summer. Iris begins to see ghosts and she is certain that the ghost is that of a boy that died several years ago. Why is he appearing to her today?

- 6) Nixon, Joan Lowery. *The Name of the Game Was Murder*. New York: Laurel Leaf. 1993. Print.

Augustus Trevor has written a manuscript which reveals his guests' darkest secrets. If anybody solves Trevor's clues, they can have their secrets removed from the manuscript. Trevor is beaten to death and it is up to the survivors to find the manuscript and the killer. (Summary taken from

[http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/497752.The\\_Name\\_of\\_the\\_Game\\_Was\\_Murder](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/497752.The_Name_of_the_Game_Was_Murder))

*The Name of the Game was Murder* was the 1994 Edgar Award winner and for good reason, it is a real whodunit. Sam, who is visiting her uncle Trevor, must find the manuscript after her uncle was found dead. She has to uncover the clue that leads to the manuscript before someone else dies. The main character Sam is smart and someone that young girls can identify with.

- 7) Nixon, Joan Lowery. *Shadowmaker*. New York: Laurel Leaf. 1994. Print

When Katie and her mother go to Kluney, a small town in Texas, they experience many unexplainable occurrences. She begins to suspect a secret gang at the high school and a company illegally storing toxic waste. (Summary taken from

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/497615.Shadowmaker>)

*Shadowmaker* was a 1995 nominee of the Edgar Award. Katie's mom is an investigative reporter and she reports on illegal dumping of toxic wastes. Katie herself, tries to solve her own mystery; the disappearance of her only friend. This features strong female characters that can be influential to young girls.

8) Nixon, Joan Lowery. *The Séance*. New York: HMH Books For Young Readers. 2004.

Print.

The story starts with Lauren not wanting to take part in a séance. Before the séance begins, she feels a foreboding of evil before the lights are turned off. Once the lights return, Sara Martin has disappeared even though all the doors and windows are locked from the inside.

(Summary taken from <http://www.amazon.com/The-Seance-Joan-Lowery-Nixon/dp/0152050299>)

*The Séance* was the 1981 Edgar Award winner and for good reason, what can be spookier than performing a séance and then someone disappearing into thin air? It started as a game and ended with the murder of Sara. At first it was believed that Sara, who liked to sneak out at night with boys, left to meet someone, but instead her body was discovered outside of town and she died by drowning. The townspeople were more upset that the kids had performed a séance instead of being upset that a girl went missing and was later found dead. What makes this spookier is that another girl goes missing and she too is found dead, like Sara, drowned.

- 9) Poe, Edgar Allan. *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. New York: Fall River Press. 2009. Print.

The story takes place in Paris where a horrific double murder has just occurred. A mother and daughter were found grotesquely mutilated and the narrator and Dupin are left to solve this murder. (Summary taken from <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/poestories/section5.rhtml>)

*The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is the first American detective story written in 1841. It has been described as Poe's finest work of deductive reasoning. The narrator is the forerunner of Dr. Watson of the Sherlock Holmes series (Information taken from <http://www.enotes.com/topics/murders-rue-morgue>). I have read this short story many times and each time I am in awe of Poe's sentence structure which is absolutely incredible, here is an excellent example: "Of Madame L'Espanaye no traces were here seen; but an unusual quantity of soot being observed in the fireplace, a search was made in the chimney, and (horrible to relate!) the corpse of the daughter, head downward, was dragged therefrom: it having been thus forced up the narrow aperture for a considerable distance" (Poe 190).

- 10) Sternberg, Libby. *Uncovering Sadie's Secrets*. Baltimore: Bancroft Press. 2033. Print.

Bianca Balducci is a fifteen year who likes to solve mysteries and she has a real doozy case with Sadie. Sadie has just started attending Bianca's school and already there is an air of mystery about her. Sadie was seen driving a car and a group of adults are looking for her. Bianca soon finds that Sadie is involved in something quite serious and she finds herself unable to stop searching for the truth. Once she finds out the truth and in the process, she learns a lesson or two. (Summary taken from <http://www.amazon.com/Uncovering-Sadies-Secrets-Libby-Sternberg/dp/1890862282>)

*Uncovering Sadie's Secrets* was an Edgar Award finalist in 2004. Bianca is a typical fifteen year old who is interested in clothes, hair and boys; but that all changes when she meets Sadie Sinclair. Bianca mentions that her sister is a private investigator and surprisingly, Sadie asks for her number. Sadie says that she needs the number for a friend who is being framed for murder, but Bianca believes that she needs an investigator for herself. The book is good for students in junior high and is especially appealing to girls who like a quick read of mysteries.



### Sources Used

"About the Edgar Allan Poe Mystery Awards." *About the Edgar Allan Poe Mystery Awards*. MysteryNet and Newfront Productions, Inc, n.d. Web. 05 May 2014.

Gaiman, Neil, and Edgar Allan Poe. *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. New York, New York: Fall River Press, 2009. Print.