A Study in Mystery
Lifelong Learning Class (LLWRC 837)
Fall 2026

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A STUDY IN MYSTERY

Class Goal: This is a seminar on mystery designed for writers and fans of the genre. We'll talk about the tropes, types and methods that make the modern whodunnit. We'll break down the formula into nice digestible chunks to lay the foundation for a ripping good mystery story. Full of theory and workshop, brainstorming and clues, we'll find out what makes and how to make an effective mystery novel. **NOTE: This class may explore adult themes, language, and content.**

Class Syllabus

Week 1: Beginnings
- Introductions & Plans
- The History of Mystery
- Genres, Vocabulary & Writing Tools
- Begin to begin – first steps

Your mission…
- *Read: "A Jury of Her Peers"*
- *For Critique:*
  - *4 or more "What ifs…"*
  - *3 THE Mystery questions*

Week 2: Elements & Stories
- The Elements of Mystery
- Mystery as Journey
- 2 Stories – the victim and the sleuth
- Building Characters,

Your next move...
- *Read: "An Alpine Divorce"*
- *For Critique*
  - *Title*
  - *First Story Sketch*

Week 3: Sleuths and Detection
- The Sleuth & Clues
- Twists, misdirection, and red herrings
- Outlining tools (BTFS)

Get a clue
- *Begin Story Outline (BTFS)*
- *For Critique:*
  - *A Clue*

Week 4: The Other Guys
- Timelines
- Subplots for depth and theme
- Suspects and Supports:
- Interviewing

Line 'em up!
- *Read: "The Big Body"*
- *Continue Story Outline (BTFS)*
- *FOR CRITIQUE:*
  - *Dialog/Interview*
  - *Log Line*

Week 5: Plots and Plotting
- Story Arcs and Acts
- Story Fractal
- The Hook
- Scenes
- Outlining your story

Connect the dots
- *FOR CRITIQUE*
  - *Scene*
  - *Story Outline (BTFS)*

Week 6: Bits, Pieces, and a Book
- Coda & Denouement.
- Series vs. One-Offs
- How to write a book

Week 7: Movie Night!
- *The Last of Sheila*