

Niebuhr, Gary Warren. *Read 'em Their Writes; a handbook for mystery and crime fiction book discussions*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2006. 249p. \$35.00 (ISBN: 1-50158-303-9)

Not all books work well for discussion, and the mystery genre is no exception. Moreover, says Niebuhr, “mystery and crime fiction deal with death and a society out of control ... participants must be willing to look at dark ugly subjects” that push comfortable boundaries. He stresses whydunnits, mysteries with some psychological depth, make the best mystery and crime fiction discussion titles. Thus he has eliminated some categories of the mystery genre from contemporary book discussion to arrive at those that truly engage the reader in more areas than just the plot.

Niebuhr’s criteria for mystery and crime fiction discussion fit all book discussions but he focuses on which mystery or crime fiction titles are interesting to read and challenging in theme, and whether the presentation remains in the mystery mold.

In his well-organized how-to for mystery discussion groups, Niebuhr includes in his tips on selecting titles. Read reviews. Read all or part of the text. Check out award lists. He readily provides several excellent mystery award web sites.

He continues his guide with basic instructions on how to select a leader, how to find participants, and how to have a quality book discussion, with models for conducting the discussions. He provides an extensive list of questions about author, plot, main characters, style, and theme, all helpful elements to jump start the discussions. In addition, he shows how to produce creative presentations to achieve more interesting discussions.

A very valuable portion of the book consists of Niebuhr’s selection of 100 mystery and crime fiction titles with such helpful information as geographic setting, time period, available web sites, readalikes, series information, and appeal points. An additional fifty titles are included in a shorter format.

In one concise book, groups wishing to specialize in mystery fiction discussions can find detailed step-by-step instructions and a wealth of information about mystery writers and their works. It is a well thought out reference work suitable for any size public library.

Donna Bettencourt
Head of Adult & Teen Services
Mesa County Public Library