

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was created in 1999 to set up, support and fund informal reading groups in prisons. We now support more than 60 groups in over 45 prisons nationwide. PRG is part of Give a Book.



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Finding a Good Read: Around the world with a lot of detectives

A regular column to help you find a good read even if you can't get to the library yet

Detective stories have been around for a very long time. Some say at least since the Greek playwright Sophocles wrote *Oedipus the King* almost 2500 years ago. The play opens with a plague that is devastating Thebes. According to the soothsayers it is punishment for the presence in the city of the unknown murderer of King Laius. When Oedipus hears this he is determined to hunt down the killer and so becomes a detective - following clues, formulating theories and interviewing witnesses. The terrible truth he discovers destroys him and throws into doubt the whole idea of human reason.

More modern fictional detectives appear in many different types and places. So let's get started with a quiz. Can you match the detective to his/her patch and creator?

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Dave Robicheaux | i. New York | a. Sara Patetsky |
| 2. Charlie Parker | ii. Ystad | b. Robert Galbraith (JK Rowling) |
| 3. Kurt Wallander | iii. Louisiana | c. John Connolly |
| 4. V I Warshowski | iv. London | d. Henning Mankell |
| 5. Cormoran Strike | v. Chicago | e. James Lee Burke |



Some of the most famous detectives are **amateurs** like Agatha Christie's Miss Marple or Dorothy Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey. The **private investigator** category includes Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe and Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade. Among the **police detectives** are Ian Rankin's John Rebus, Colin Dexter's Inspector Morse and Georges Simenon's Maigret. **Forensic specialists** range from Patricia Cornwell's Chief Medical Examiner Kay Scarpetta to Kathy Reich's Temperance Brennan.

Historical crime fiction includes some unlikely detectives: Lindsey Davis's ancient Roman, Marcus Didius Falco; Ellis Peters' 12C monk Cadfael; CJ Sansom's 16C hunchbacked lawyer, Matthew Shardlake; S J Parris' Elizabethan Giordano Bruno; or Antonia Hodgson's 18C Thomas Hawkins.

Setting is often a key element in detective novels. It may be a small community where everyone seems to know everyone else, such as Ann Cleeves' Shetland or Kingsmarkham, the mid-Sussex town where Ruth Rendell's Inspector Wexford works. Or the setting may be the anonymous 'mean streets' of a big city where people are strangers. If there's a particular place that intrigues you, check out its detectives and authors.

Los Angeles: home to Raymond Chandler's cynical, wise-cracking Philip Marlowe '*I needed a drink, I needed a lot of life insurance, I needed a vacation, I needed a home in the country. What I had was a coat, a hat and a gun. I put them on and went out of the room.*'

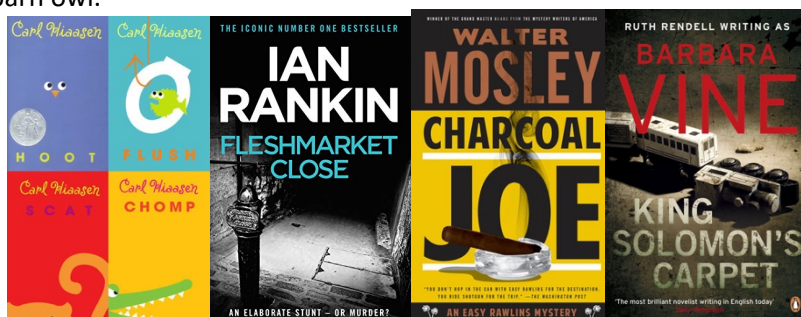
There's also Michael Connelly and his detective, Hieronymus 'Harry' Bosch '*I'm relaxed, Belk. I call it Zen and the art of not giving a sh**.*'

Walter Mosley's African American Easy Rawlins opens up a different side of the city and its people: '*What if is fo' chirrens Easy. You's a man.*'

London: there's Sherlock Holmes at 221B Baker St of course, but also lots of others. Barbara Vine's ***King Solomon's Carpet*** is set in South London but the real focus of interest is the underground tube system where characters find thrills, danger, work, love, obsession. North of the river is home to Nick Belsey, Oliver Harris's detective cop.

Scotland: there's the Edinburgh of Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus; William McIlvanney's Glasgow as seen through the eyes of DI Jack Laidlaw; or the howling wind off the North Sea in Aberdeen as presented in Stuart MacBride's Logan McRae novels; and then of course there are Val McDermid's novels that range from Fife to the Highlands and Islands.

Detective fiction can be violent and grim. It can also be hilarious. For bloody action laced with laughs try Carl Hiaasen and his 30-odd books set in Florida. The novels are full of really wacky events and characters like Skink, the ex-Governor of the state who survives on a diet of roadkill, has braids decorated with buzzard beaks and when one of his eyes gets knocked out, he replaces it with one from a stuffed barn owl.



One of the pleasures of a lot of modern detectives is their cynicism and smart talk:

'The cheaper the crook, the gaudier the patter.' (Sam Spade)

'[Get out of here] rather than hanging around like a fart under a duvet' (John Rebus)

'Never underestimate a man's ability to underestimate a woman.' (V I Warshawski)

'A big part of the job is looking for the worst in people. Turns out I excel at that.' (Jessica Jones)

Quiz answers 1. iii e; 2. I c; 3. li d; 4. V a; 5. iv

Note: your library may not have all of these titles or even any of them, but it's sure to have some of the authors mentioned. So if you like the sound of any of the books mentioned, just include 'or any other books by ...' on your request app.

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