

It's Elementary! Kid-size Mysteries Budding Detectives Will Love - ParentMap

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It's Elementary! Kid-size Mysteries Budding Detectives Will Love

Winter is the perfect time for young sleuths to test out their skills with a modern-day mystery

By *Gemma Alexander*



When temperatures drop and leaves fall, the urge to settle in with a hot drink and a good book can be powerful. For almost as long as there have been novels, readers have known that the pleasure is even greater when the book is a spine-chilling mystery novel.

Your kids may not be old enough for the sordid murders of Dashiell Hammett or the florid language of Arthur Conan Doyle, but that doesn't mean you have to wait to share your love of the genre with the next generation of armchair detectives. Kids' natural curiosity is perfectly suited to intrigue, and the knowledge that clues are scattered through a story encourages close reading.

[Enter the Sherlock in the City giveaway](#)

One lucky family will win a night at

And with *The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes* on at Pacific Science Center, you have a perfect companion activity: Read a mystery, then try to solve one (with Sherlock's help) at Pacific Science Center.

One lucky family will win a night at the Four Seasons, Pacific Science Center membership, \$100 gift certificate to Tavolàta and more.

Here is our list of mysteries that'll keep your kids guessing. All of these are [fair play mysteries](#) so your kiddo won't feel cheated, and all of them are series, so they have the option of going back for more when they find one they love.

Early readers and mystery-solving mice

Ask any chapter book-reader and they'll tell you mice make great detectives. Why else would there be such a bounty of them in chapter book mysteries? Eve Titus' *Basil of Baker Street* (adapted as *The Great Mouse Detective* by Disney in 1986) lives in Sherlock Holmes' cellar and learned sleuthing (literally) at the master's feet. Putting a feminine spin on the Holmes/Watson dynamic, Margery Tharpe's *The Rescuers* has the fabulous Miss Bianca leading dear, loyal Bernard around the world rescuing humans in service to the Prisoners' Aid Society of Mice.

Currently dominating the genre are the sibling series of *Geronimo Stilton* and *Thea Stilton*, created by Elisabetta Dami.

Second only to talking mice are the promising kid detectives. *Encyclopedia Brown* is a classic fair-play series in which the reader solves each mystery alongside the 10-year-old protagonist. *Cam Jansen* thwarts diamond thieves and dognappers with her photographic memory. Got a kid who only wants to read about sports? Try the *Ballpark Mysteries*, in which cousins Kate and Mike combine baseball trivia and detective work in each book to solve a mystery at a different ballpark.

The pun-filled *Chet Gecko* mysteries prove that noir needn't be dark. Fourth-grade detective Chet and his mockingbird sidekick, Natalie Attired, solve illustrated schoolyard mysteries with titles that echo Dashiell Hammett novels, guaranteeing parents will enjoy reading these at bedtime as much as kids will.

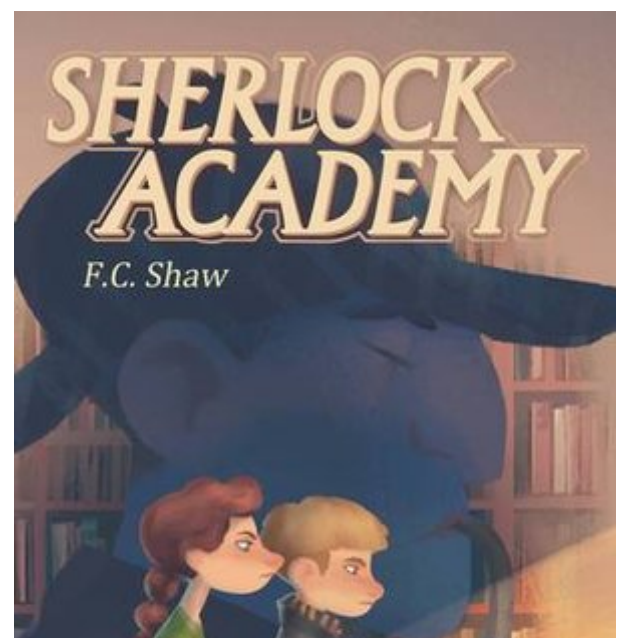
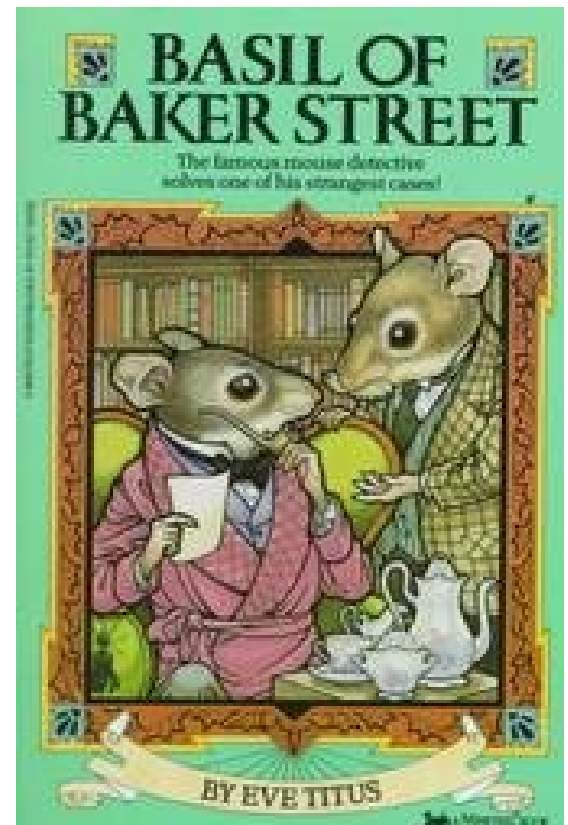
And it's never too early to introduce your kids to the classics. Kids still love *The Boxcar Children*. *Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew* presents a tween Nancy solving age-appropriate mysteries for a younger audience without the dated aspects of the originals; and *Hardy Boys: Secret Files* does the same for that classic duo.

Middle-grade mysteries

Middle-grade readers love a good mystery. Their higher-order thinking skills are emerging, and nothing beats figuring out whodunit a page before the protagonist. Many of the more famous Sherlock Holmes books have been abridged for this age group, but there are plenty of other mysteries waiting to be solved.

In the new *Sherlock Academy* series, Rollie and his best friend Cecily attend the titular school on London's Baker Street where they get on-the-job training to be detectives like the great Holmes.

Introduce your middle-grader to another beloved detective, *Precious Ramotswe of the Number One Ladies Detective Agency*, in Alexander McCall Smith's [series](#) for kids. These books present the famously crafty P.I. as an 8-year-old tracking down lost animals and stolen snacks.



middle-graders love the multi-author **Clue Series**. In the first 10 books, two siblings compete against their corrupt relatives to complete the Clue Hunt and solve the mysteries of their family's great power — and their parents' death. There are literally dozens of books in five spin-off series. But before you write these off as pulp, take note that Rick Riordan and Newbery-winner Linda Sue Park are among the contributing authors.



Three Times Lucky by Sheila Turnage introduces kids to a bit of Southern Gothic when sixth-grade protagonist Miss Moses LoBeau must solve a murder to save her adoptive family.

Murray Shaw's librarian-recommended series, **On the Case with Holmes and Watson**, adapts Sherlock Holmes into middle grade-level graphic novels. Each book has a special section at the back that helps kids break down how Holmes solved the mystery.

Enola Holmes, Sherlock's much-younger sister (the series skews towards the younger end of YA, too), has some sleuthing chops of her own. Tweens and younger teens will be as intrigued by the Victorian strictures Enola must escape as by the mysteries she must solve.

Young adult detectives

The YA genre is packed with re-imagined classics, and the great sleuth is no exception. What many of them lack in polish they make up in creative premises. Take, for example, **Lock & Mori**. It gets mixed reviews on Goodreads (most of the complaints are about the writing style), but the story is pure catnip for many YA readers. Set in modern-day London, teenagers Lock and Mori compete to solve a crime, but the real mystery is whether they will end up lovebirds or enemies.

Jamie Watson doesn't want to attend the same prep school as **Charlotte Holmes**, descendant of the famous detective. His worst fears are confirmed when the two are thrown together to solve crimes that strangely parallel their ancestors' most famous cases.

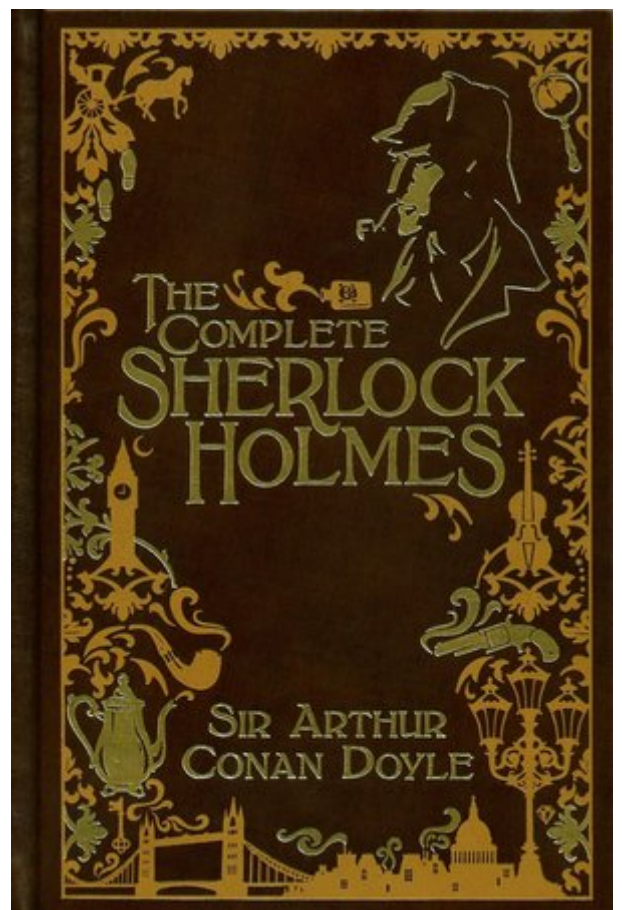
Ellie Marney's **Every** series is set in modern-day Melbourne, Australia. In it, country girl Rachel Watts can't resist partnering with the troubled, yet brilliant, James Mycroft, to use his forensic genius to investigate a murder.

Part of the appeal of Sherlock Holmes is the contrast between rigidly polite Victorian society and London's seedy underbelly. That contrast is brought up to date in the **Prep School Confidential** series that places a former Queen Bee in a tony new prep school where the closets are full of skeletons.

Traditionally, a fair play novel cannot involve the supernatural. But many YA readers wouldn't think of reading a book without a little bit of magic. Enter Pacific Northwest author Emma Jane Holloway with **The Baskerville Affair**, an alternate history steampunk adventure starring Holmes' niece Evelina Cooper. Featuring sorcery, automatons and a talking mouse, among other impossibilities, it's a mystery series more arcane than Doyle could ever have imagined.

And of course, if they are willing to adjust to the Victorian syntax, teens will not find themselves any more challenged or shocked by the contents of the original **Sherlock Holmes** novels than by the contents of almost any book on YA shelves today. But they might find themselves more intrigued.

Finally, if your kids are drawn to the Conan Doyle series, the Seattle Public Library has put together a [multimedia list](#) of supporting resources for kids (all available for check-out). The list includes lots of nonfiction books about forensics and novels involving Sherlock Holmes and his relatives (I'm particularly intrigued by [Shane Peacock's YA](#) interpretation of Sherlock as a



half-Jewish, impoverished teen).

Happy sleuthing!

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