

MYSTERY WRITING WORKSHOP

What is a Mystery?

ALL MYSTERIES SHARE 3 MAIN ELEMENTS

1. A secret, unknown to both protagonist and reader, that poses a story question
2. A protagonist in search of an answer to that story question
3. Clues to allow an alert reader to solve the mystery

WHAT ABOUT THRILLERS AND SUSPENSE?

- Not mysteries
- You may wonder what's going to happen (or when it's going to happen) but they don't include all 3 elements

'A' IS FOR ALIBI BY SUE GRAFTON

- ✓ **A secret:** Who killed Lawrence Fife?
- ✓ **A protagonist:** Kinsey Millhone, a private investigator
- ✓ **Clues:** the allergy pills, the dead dog, the tax records

✓ *A Mystery*

THE DAVINCI CODE BY DAN BROWN

- ✓ A secret: Where is the Sangreal?
- ✓ A protagonist: Robert Langdon, an academic
- ✓ Clues: ????

✓ A Mystery

TITANIC (1997)

- ✓ **A secret:** What happened to the Heart of the Ocean?
- ✗ **A protagonist:** At first it seems like Brock Lovett may be the protagonist, but it's actually Rose (and she knows the answer)
- ✗ **Clues:** There are no clues about the necklace's whereabouts

✗ *Not a Mystery*

WIZARD OF OZ (1939)

- ✓ **A secret:** How to get from Oz to Kansas?
- ✓ **A protagonist:** Dorothy, a Kansas farm girl
- ✓ **Clues:** Dorothy's bump on the head, the same actors appearing in Kansas and Oz...

✓ *A Mystery*