

Spotlight on Thriller

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Thrillers are exciting books full of suspense, surprise, anticipation and anxiety. They might be horror stories, or they might be fast-paced crime thrillers that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

The history of thrillers

The ancient Greeks used to tell stories full of suspension and tension, so the thriller genre is very old.

In the 1700s the Gothic novel genre began.

During the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s more people could read, and cheap horror novels called Penny Dreadfuls became popular.

During the twentieth century the World Wars, the Cold War, the Great Depression and technological advances influenced the thriller genre.

Horror novels became popular again during the 1980s, and from the 1990s onwards many YA books included thriller themes.

Common themes in thrillers

Stories that create an emotional response – like fear, anxiety, exhilaration, dread.

The main character has a goal that seems impossible at times, and must achieve it before disaster strikes.

Thrillers often include detailed information about the setting, eg. the legal system, forensics.

The main character must learn new skills to cope with the situation.

There are twists and surprises.

The main character must solve a mystery.

Ordinary people behave in heroic ways.

The main character is fighting for justice.

There is violence, gore and death.

There can be monsters or supernatural creatures.

The main character is fighting something terrifying.

Some genres that thrillers cross over with

Medical thriller
Legal thriller
Action thriller
Sci-fi thriller
Romantic thriller
Spy thriller
Techno thriller
Crime thriller
Political thriller
Psychological thriller
Horror thriller
Paranormal thriller

Popular thriller writers

David Baldacci
Stephen King
Edgar Allen Poe
Carlos Ruiz Zafon
Ted Dekker
Dan Brown
Kathy Reichs
Frank Peretti