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Dare to Know

Legal Fiction

Fiction that features the practice of law and the interaction of lawyers, prosecutors, clients, witnesses, and judges.

Also known as “courtroom drama” and “legal thrillers.” A genre in which the plot centers on specific criminal investigations, legal dilemmas, or courtroom dramas. The protagonist is usually an attorney who is involved in a legal case and investigates the crime on his or her own initiative, typically on behalf of an innocent client. The lawyer’s task is to solve the crime despite adversarial forces and successfully argue their case in court. The protagonist's life is often in danger, as are the lives of his or her loved ones. The police are usually presented as being unable to achieve justice due to incompetence, stubbornness, laziness, or corruption. These stories usually showcase the impacts of navigating the judicial system on the characters involved, and ask readers to ponder their understanding of justice. Authors writing in this genre must possess a deep knowledge of the rules, procedures, and language of the legal world. Legal fiction can incorporate elements of **detective and mystery fiction**. Melville Davisson Post’s *The Strange Schemes of Randolph Mason* (1896), Arthur Cheney Train’s *Tutt and Mr. Tutt* (1920), Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* (1925), Francis Noyes Hart’s *The Bellamy Trial* (1926), Earle Stanley Gardner’s *The Case of the Velvet Claws* (1933), John Masterman’s *An Oxford Tragedy* (1933), and Robert Traver’s *Anatomy of a Murder* (1958) are early examples.

Common Elements

Criminal trials
Civil court cases
The legal process
Guilt and innocence

Justice and injustice
Truth and lies
Corruption

Benefits of Reading

Allows readers to understand criminal motivations
Permits readers to explore their belief in humanity
Enables readers to make sense of evil in the world

Encourages readers to question themes of guilt and innocence
Assists readers in developing a broader understanding of justice
Educates readers on the intricacies of the legal system

Modern Literary Examples

The Competition (2014) by Marcia Clark

Dead Irish (1989) by John Lescroart

<i>Defending Jacob</i> (2012) by William Landay
<i>A Defense for the Dead</i> (2004) by Michael Fredrickson
<i>Degree of Guilt</i> (1993) by Richard North Patterson
<i>Déjà Karma</i> (2015) by Vish Dhamija
<i>Everywhere that Mary Went</i> (1993) by Lisa Scottoline
<i>Final Jeopardy</i> (1996) by Linda Fairstein
<i>An Innocent Client</i> (2008) by Scott Pratt
<i>Judgment Calls</i> (2003) by Alafair Burke
<i>The Jury</i> (2001) by Steve Martini
<i>The Jury Master</i> (2006) by Robert Dugoni
<i>No Lesser Plea</i> (1987) by Robert K. Tanenbaum
<i>The Lincoln Lawyer</i> (2005) by Michael Connelly

<i>The Little Death</i> (1986) by Michael Nava
<i>The Pardon</i> (1994) by James Grippando
<i>A Patriot's Act</i> (2014) by Kenneth Eade
<i>Presumed Innocent</i> (1987) by Scott Turow
<i>The Reckoning</i> (2018) by John Grisham
<i>Retribution</i> (2003) by Jilliane Hoffman
<i>Rumpole of the Bailey</i> (1978) by John Mortimer
<i>The Runaway Jury</i> (1996) by John Grisham
<i>Small Great Things</i> (2016) by Jodi Picoult
<i>Snowing Falling on Cedars</i> (1994) by David Guterson
<i>To Speak for the Dead</i> (1990) by Paul Levine
<i>The Trials of Nikki Hill</i> (1999) by Christopher Darden and Dick Lochte