**Intro questions:**

1. How would you define theatrical “suspense thrillers”?
2. What suspense thrillers do you know?
3. Are they worth seeing, in your opinion?

**Questions for the reading:**

1. Did your definition of suspense thrillers come close to the definition in the text?
2. In your own words, what is the difference between suspense thrillers and mysteries?
3. What does the title *Wait Until Dark* refer to?
4. Which of the plays mentioned have also been filmed – according to the article?
5. Why is the *Perfect Crime* a combination of suspense and romance?
6. What is the question asked in *Bad Seed*?

**Suspense Thrillers**

by [**Wade Bradford**](https://www.thoughtco.com/wade-bradford-2712792)

Unlike mysteries in which the audience searches for clues to figure out “whodunit,” thrillers let viewers know who the bad guys are in advance. Then, the audience spends the rest of the play on the edge of their 1 seats wondering who will win: the evil doer or the innocent victim?

Here are five of the best stage thrillers in theatrical history:

***Wait Until Dark* by Frederick Knott**

In this slick, slightly dated 2 thriller, three 3 manipulate a blind woman.

They want the secret contents hidden inside a mysterious doll, and they are willing 4 to 5 it – even murder.

Fortunately, the blind protagonist, Suzy Hendrix, is 6 enough to use her other heightened senses to combat the criminals. In the climactic final act, Suzy gains the advantage when she shuts off all the lights in her apartment. Then, the bad guys are in her territory!

***Deathtrap* by Ira Levin**

A reviewer from Cue Magazine calls Levin’s comic suspense play, “two thirds a thriller and one-third a devilishly clever comedy.” And the play is indeed 7 ! The premise: a formerly successful author is so desperate for another hit; he seems willing to murder a younger more talented writer in order to steal his brilliant manuscript. But that’s only the beginning!

Plot twists and 8 9 throughout *Deathtrap.* Try to see this one live at your local community theatre.

However, if you can’t wait for it to be revived, the Michael Caine film is a fun ride as well.

***Dial M for Murder* by Frederick Knott**

Another “Knotty” thriller, this play became an instant theatrical hit as well as an [Alfred Hitchcock](https://www.thoughtco.com/alfred-hitchcock-master-of-suspense-728184) classic.

Believing that he has planned the perfect crime, a cold-hearted husband hires a thug to murder his wife.

The audience members hold their breath as they watch to see what happens next. Will the husband get away with the 10 deed? Will the wife survive? (Don’t hold your breath for too long – the play runs about two hours!)

***Perfect Crime* by Warren Manzi**

This show is currently the longest running play in New York City history. This off-Broadway thriller has been running since 1987. Believe it or not, lead actress Catherine Russell has starred in *Perfect Crime* since its premiere. That means she performed in over 8,000 shows – missing a 11 four performances during the last twenty years. (Can a person stay 12 after all those performances???)

I have not seen *Perfect Crime* yet, so I’ll let the press release speak for itself: “The main character is a Harvard-educated psychiatrist accused of 13 her wealthy British husband. The play is set in an 14 Connecticut town where this suspected murderess conducts her practice out of her 15 . The handsome detective assigned to the case must overcome his own love-interest in the wife as he seeks to discover who murdered the husband, if indeed he was murdered at all.” Sounds like a good combination of suspense and romance.

***The Bad Seed* by Maxwell Anderson**

Based upon the novel by William March, *The Bad Seed* asks a disturbing question. Are some people born evil? Eight-year old Rhoda Penmark seems to be.

To me, this play is seriously disturbing. Rhoda behaves sweetly and innocently around adults but can be murderously 16 during one-on-one encounters. I can’t recall a play in which such a young child is portrayed as such a manipulative sociopath. The psychopathic Rhoda makes the 17 ghost girl from The Ring look like a Strawberry Shortcake.

**Vocabulary:** *For each definition below, find the matching expression in the text, highlighted in yellow and numbered 1-17.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Heinous | very bad and shocking |
| Abound | to exist in large numbers |
| Resourceful | good at finding effective ways to deal with problems |
| Proverbial | as used in a proverb or other phrase |
| Con-man | someone who lies in order to make people give them money |
| To go to any lengths | To do anything you can to achieve something |
| Creepy | strange or unnatural and making you feel frightened |
| Retrieve | to get something back, especially something that is not easy to find |
| Affluent | having a lot of money or owning a lot of things |
| Treachery | behaviour that deceives or is not loyal to someone who trusts you |
| Devilish | morally bad but in an attractive way |
| Sane | having a healthy mind and not mentally ill |
| Bump off | Slang: to kill/murder somebody |
| Devious | dishonest, often in a complicated way, but often also clever and successful |
| Cat-and-mouse | a situation in which you let someone else believe that they have managed to escape, before you actually catch them |
| Secluded mansion | A big and wealthy house standing on its own, far from other houses…and people |
| mere | used to emphasize that something is not large or important |