



INDIANA  
REPERTORY  
THEATRE



## STUDY GUIDE

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### Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, adapted by Ken Ludwig

A luxury train trapped in a snowdrift, a dining car full of glamorous passengers, a dead body with multiple stab wounds, a suspicious intruder who keeps disappearing, and mysterious links to a far-distant murder case. Hercule Poirot, the world's greatest detective, must interrupt his holiday to solve this fiendishly intricate and clever plot—before the snow is cleared and the train moves on. A golden-age detective story springs to life from the pages of the world's best-selling author.

#### COVER ART BY KYLE RAGSDALE

**STUDENT MATINEES** 10:00AM on March 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 24

**ESTIMATED LENGTH** Approximately 2 hours

**AGE RANGE** Recommended for grades 9-12

**CONTENT ADVISORY** *Murder on the Orient Express* is Agatha Christie's thrilling whodunit and contains profanity and onstage violence. It is recommended for grades 9-12.

#### STUDENT MATINEES AND ARTIST IN THE CLASSROOM

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#### HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

To enrich your students' experience at the IRT production of *Murder on the Orient Express*, this guide provides an overview of the materials available to you and your students. It is designed to aid you in accessing materials on companion websites as well as design lesson plans that can be used both prior to and following the performance.

The guide is divided into two sections:

- Information about the Production: includes a synopsis of the play, statements by the director and the designers, and a guide to the role of the audience
- Educational Materials: Focusing on materials on the history of Agatha Christie and the time in which she wrote, and lessons you can use in the classroom

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## THE STORY OF *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*

It is 1934. Belgian private detective Hercule Poirot arrives at the Tokatlian Hotel in Istanbul, where he receives a telegram prompting him to return to London. He tries to book himself a compartment on the Orient Express leaving that night, but the train is fully booked. Eventually he obtains a berth through the intervention of his friend Monsieur Bouc, the director of the railway.

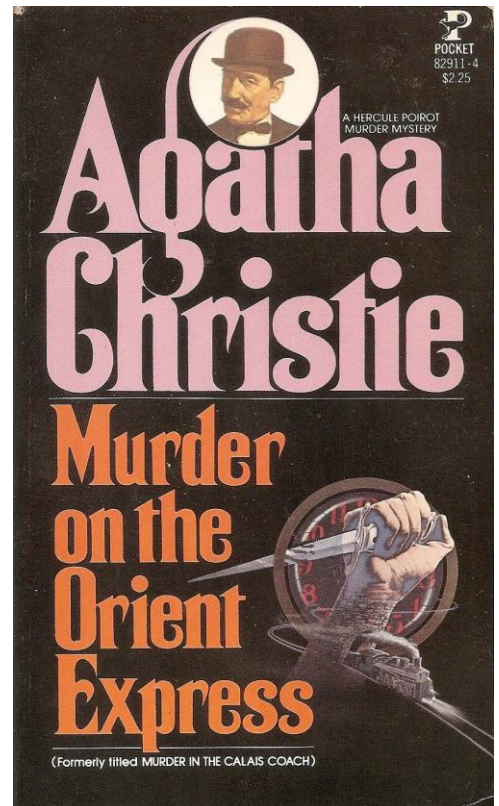
At the station, Poirot and Bouc meet Michel, the conductor, and board the train with their fellow passengers, a fascinating and varied group: the elderly Princess Dragomiroff, a Russian in exile, and her traveling companion, Greta Ohlsson, a shy and awkward Swedish missionary; Mary Debenham, a British governess, and Colonel Arbuthnot, a Scottish military man; Samuel Ratchett, a brash and vulgar American business man, and Hector Macqueen, his browbeaten secretary; Countess Andrenyi, a glamorous Hungarian noblewoman who is also a doctor; and Helen Hubbard, a flamboyant, outspoken American with several ex-husbands. Once he recognizes Poirot, Ratchett tries to hire him to investigate some death threats he has received, but Poirot refuses the case.

As all the passengers prepare for bed, Ratchett is annoyed by Mrs. Hubbard's singing in her room next door. Later in the night, Mrs. Hubbard calls Michel to reports that she has awakened to find a man in her room, who has disappeared. Meanwhile, the train has stopped in the middle of the mountains, stuck in a snowbank.

The next morning, Ratchett is discovered stabbed to death in his bed. Bouc persuades Poirot to investigate the case and solve it before a snow crew arrives and an inept police investigation stirs up scandal for his elite, high-paying passengers. Poirot notes that the window has been left open in Ratchett's compartment, but there are no footprints outside the window in the snow. A drugged wine glass is found in the compartment, along with Ratchett's broken pocket watch stopped at 1:15, a ladies' handkerchief with the initial "H," and a charred piece of paper that says, "Remember little Daisy Armstrong." This last clue enables Poirot to identify Ratchett's true identity: Bruno Cassetti, who kidnapped and brutally murdered a three-year-old girl and then escaped conviction.

Poirot begins to interview each passenger, to learn what each knows about the famous Armstrong case, and what each has been doing since getting on the train. More clues are revealed. A mysterious second conductor has been seen aboard the train. Mrs. Hubbard finds a button from a conductor's uniform in her room. Miss Debenham finds the murder weapon and is wounded by an unknown assailant with a gun. A conductor's uniform is found in Greta's suitcase—and it is missing a button.

Eventually, as the rescue team nears the snowbound train, Poirot gathers all of the passengers into the dining car and propounds two possible solutions. The first solution he offers is that a stranger entered the train when it stopped at Sofia, killed Ratchett, and disembarked from the train. The second solution he proposes is much more complex....



## CLUES

BY JANET ALLEN, MARGOT LACY ECCLES ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Agatha Christie's plays have been beguiling IRT audiences from the very first years of the theatre's existence. We delight in producing them, and audiences invariably delight in watching them. I suppose this should come as no surprise: her play *The Mousetrap* continues to run in London, and has done continuously since 1952. Clearly Dame Agatha knew a little something about stage-worthiness! Christie's work has the uncanny ability to draw people from many different walks of life under her spell. She appeals to both men and women, and widely across cultures, as her work has been translated into more than 50 languages. She continues, now more than four decades after her death, to be a household name the world over—a bit like Barbie or the Beatles!

Two actual events inspired Mrs. Christie's exotic 1934 story: one was personal, one was taken from international news. Mrs. Christie was herself marooned on the Orient Express for 24 hours in 1928 by rain and a mudslide in Turkey, returning home from one of her husband's Middle Eastern archeological digs. The other real-life incident that deeply influenced her story was the 1932 Lindbergh kidnapping, in which internationally famous aviator Charles Lindbergh's young son was kidnapped, held for ransom, and later found dead. These two incidents came together in Christie's imagination to create this spell-binding story, which reflects a sentiment that is rarely found in her work: the murder victim is particularly hated for his cruelty to a child, and the people who loved that child.

Anyone who has ever read an Agatha Christie story, seen a play or film based on her work, or played the game of *Clue*, will recognize the tried and true structure: a small group of people are stranded in some remote place from which no one can depart. A murder takes place. Who did this? Why and how? The suspects are gathered by a detective, who tells them that no one may leave (as if they could). He (or she) interviews them one by one, and, in the end, collects the interested parties and reveals the deductions that led to the murderer, the motive, and the method. Justice is done. Order is restored.

Christie wrote 66 detective novels that generally follow this formula. While it is true that she learned a great deal from Arthur Conan Doyle, whose *Sherlock Holmes* stories were written a generation earlier, Christie added a lot of her own finesse to the genre. But two truths she stole wholesale: the detective is eccentric; and the solving process depends on reasoning, clue detection, and exact thinking, and very little on emotion. This apparent lack of empathy she very nearly violates in *Murder on the Orient Express*.

## CLUES [CONTINUED]

And of course, *Murder on the Orient Express* features the eccentric Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, one of Christie's two famous detectives. (Her other is Miss Marple, quite a different breed of detective, being female and British and therefore considerably more tractable.) Poirot's strange personal habits make him a colorful character on screen and on stage as well as on the page. The mysteries behind the life of the detective himself deepen the experience for the reader and/or viewer. And Mrs. Christie held to an important value with her detectives: they carry no weapons, they are never involved in fisticuffs, they disdain violence of all kinds—which only seems to fuel their craft and tenacity. This is only the second play the IRT has produced which features Monsieur Poirot: the first was in 1989, in our production of *Black Coffee* (directed by former artistic director Tom Haas, and featuring Michael Lipton as Poirot).

Producing Christie requires equal mastery of directing, design, and casting. Ambience plays a large role in her work, whether it is the rainy British countryside or a lavish European train—complete with dining cars and sleeping compartments—enmired in the snow. Casting is key, as the characters must be vivid, singular, often cagey, and never cartoony. And finally the directing: a murder mystery requires precision, intense focus on detail (as everything can be a clue!), careful crafting of relationships (because every look can be a clue!), and expert timing (because often even the clock is a clue!). We are delighted to see this production come to life under the elegant and exacting hand of director Risa Brainin. So, on with the mystery! Let the detection begin!



The Orient Express train at a train station, 1930s.

## DIRECTOR NOTE | “MURDER BY THE NUMBERS”

BY RISA BRAININ, DIRECTOR

Who doesn't love a good murder mystery? Published in 1934, *Murder on the Orient Express* has been adapted into three radio plays (1966, 1992, and 2017), two films 40 years apart (1974 and 2017), three television programs (including a Japanese version in 2015), and one lone play which premiered in 2017. I find that 32-year gap between the novel and the first radio play very intriguing. Why didn't anyone take a crack at it? And more intriguing: why has there never been a stage adaptation before now? Let's see: 13 characters; settings that include a restaurant in Istanbul, a train platform, three different train compartments, a corridor, and a dining car on the stunning Orient Express. This list may have been daunting to some ... but not Ken Ludwig.

I remember seeing the first film and absolutely loving it. What I admired most were the rich, colorful characters played by so many great stars of the day: Albert Finney (in an incredible, over-the-top, scenery-chewing performance), Lauren Bacall, Vanessa Redgrave, Sean Connery, and more—the cast was a wow. Agatha Christie wrote fabulous roles, and Ludwig's version exploits, expands, delights in those wonderful renderings. He has remained true to the original when it comes to portraying these delightfully complex, dramatic, and quirky individuals. Casting this play was a joy! We have brought together a magnificent group of actors from around the country to bring this familiar and well-loved mystery to life. Creating a dynamic world for both the IRT stage and co-producer Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park was challenging in the very best of ways. We hope you'll enjoy the ride!



Costume rendering of Hercule Poirot by Devon Painter, Costume Designer

## DESIGNERS' NOTES

### ROBERT M. KOHARCHIK SCENIC DESIGNER

As a fan of Agatha Christie, designing the set for *Murder on the Orient Express* was both thrilling and challenging. Due to the layout of both IRT and Cincinnati theatre spaces, we knew early in the design process that recreating an actual train would be impractical. Inspired by images of the Orient Express and by the Art Deco style, the set design for this production endeavors to capture the opulence of the period while providing fluid movement from one train car to the next as we watch one of Christie's most memorable characters solve the case.

### DEVON PAINTER COSTUME DESIGNER

It is an absolute pleasure to breathe life into Agatha Christie's dramatic and stylish people on the stage. *Orient Express* is an especially lush story, set in an exotic location and a very stylish bygone world. The costume design presents how each character wishes to be perceived, using a high style appearance as a foil to deceive.

### MICHAEL KECK COMPOSER

Every piece of music begins as an experiment, as well as an adventure, with absolutely no idea where the score will land. I enjoy the mystery of creativity, imagining how the author's text will develop into a fully staged production. Clues provided by the playwright merge with wisdom from the creative team to yield the first sketch, a demo to share with the director and her team. Ideas always require refinement, but eventually we hit the sweet spot with music that serves as a vital link between the drama and the audience. The map for this particular adventure includes two previous IRT productions that I worked on with director Risa Brainin: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (2012) and *Holmes and Watson* (2018), murder mysteries infused with the romanticism of the 19th century. I'm excited to return to IRT and rejoin Risa's team and continue the adventure with this new production, further exploring, with new ideas, arrangements, and instrumentation.

### L. B. MORSE PROJECTIONS DESIGNER

The projections in *Murder on the Orient Express* serve two purposes in our production. The first is to provide imagery that helps support realistic locations and environments, such as the inside a restaurant, the architecture of a train platform, or the snowy mountains rolling past outside the window of a luxury train. The team has found a wealth of great period imagery reflecting the exotic locations we visit, as well as the wonderful lavish interiors of the Orient Express itself, and we want to use the projections to help showcase these great period elements. The second function of the projections is to help us lean into a noir feel for the play by allowing us cinematic glimpses into the memories, details, and clues that help shape Poirot's unraveling of the mystery. We want to explore the inner workings of Poirot's mind as he tracks down the killer, and the projections help highlight this journey.



Costume rendering of the Countess by Devon Painter, Costume Designer

**AUTHOR AGATHA CHRISTIE**

BY RICHARD J ROBERTS, RESIDENT DRAMATURG

Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was born in 1890 in Torquay, Devonshire, England. Her father was American, her mother English. As a child Agatha never attended school. Shy and unable to express her feelings, she first turned to music as a means of expression and, later in life, to writing. Her father taught her arithmetic, but her mother believed education destroyed the brain and ruined the eyes. She taught Agatha history and what she called “general knowledge.” The house was filled with books and newspapers, and Agatha and her older brother and sister were encouraged to read and write.

When Agatha was 11, her father died. Despite financial difficulties, Agatha’s mother maintained the family’s genteel facade and continued Agatha’s eclectic education. She took Swedish exercise classes and studied the piano, singing, and dancing. At 16, she began two years of finishing school in Paris, where she learned French and German and took gymnastics and tennis lessons. Her mother wanted Agatha to be a concert pianist or an opera singer, but stage fright and shyness prevented her from pursuing a career in music.

Agatha’s mother developed health problems and decided that a warmer climate might be beneficial. When Agatha returned from France, her mother took her to Egypt for three months. There was a small English colony there, and Agatha could make her social debut more cheaply than in London. Thus began Agatha’s lifelong fascination with the Middle East. Upon returning to England,

Agatha met Lieutenant Archibald Christie of the Royal Field Artillery. After a two-year engagement, Agatha and Archie were married in 1914.







During World War I, the new Mrs. Christie signed on as a nurse at a Red Cross hospital near her mother in Torquay. Promoted to the dispensary, she trained for the apothecaries' exam, learning all about drugs and poisons. This newly acquired knowledge inspired her to try her hand at a murder mystery.

In 1919, Christie gave birth to her only child, Rosalind, named after Shakespeare's heroine. In 1920 her first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was published. This was the world's first introduction to Christie's Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot. In 1922 Christie published her second book, beginning a book-a-year pattern. Her name appeared on the best-seller lists the rest of her life.

In 1926 Christie published what some consider her masterpiece, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. That same year, her mother died after a severe illness. While still mourning, Christie found out that her husband was having an affair with a younger woman. Shortly thereafter, Christie disappeared for eleven days. When found, she claimed amnesia, and the mystery remains unsolved.

Christie divorced her husband and went to southern Iraq to join an archaeological dig. There she met Max Mallowan, an archaeological assistant who would eventually become one of the most prominent archaeologists of his generation. The two were completely unlike in background, education, profession, and age—she was 40, he was 26—but they recognized that they complemented each other, and they married in 1930. That same year, Christie published her first Miss Marple novel, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, and she premiered her first play, *Black Coffee*, at the Embassy Theatre in London's West End.

Throughout the 1930s, Agatha accompanied Max on his archaeological digs, taking her portable typewriter along. She told reporters: “An archaeologist is the best husband any woman can have. The older she gets, the more interested he is in her.” Christie always made use of her travels in her novels, such as *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *Death on the Nile* (1937). In 1939 she published her most popular book, *Ten Little Indians* (also known as *And Then There Were None*).

During World War II, Christie lived in London, serving as a dispenser at University College Hospital. Between 1940 and 1945, she published ten new novels and adapted two earlier novels for the stage, including *Ten Little Indians*. She also wrote “final” books for the Poirot and Miss Marple series; these were to be kept in her publisher’s vault and not to be published until after her death.

After the war, Christie and Max continued to travel together. She gained further success on the stage and in the cinema. The *Mousetrap* opened in London in 1952; it is still running today, 68 years later, making it the longest running play in the world. *Witness for the Prosecution* opened in London in 1953; Billy Wilder adapted and directed the 1957 film starring Charles Laughton and Marlene Dietrich.

Christie was named a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1971. In 1972, she broke her leg and experienced heart trouble that required considerable bed rest. She continued writing, producing new mysteries regularly every year to 1973. Her last public appearance was in 1974 at the opening of the movie version of her novel *Murder on the Orient Express*. The success of that film prompted her to release the final Poirot book she had written 30 years earlier, *Curtains*.



Dame Agatha died peacefully in Wallingford in 1976. She was buried in the country churchyard of Cholsey Parish near her home. A few months later, *Sleeping Murder*, the final Miss Marple novel, was published. The author had always claimed she was not very fond of Hercule Poirot, and she had killed him off in his final book; but Miss Marple lived on.

## THE ORIENT EXPRESS

BY RICHARD J ROBERTS, RESIDENT DRAMATURG

The Orient Express was renowned for luxury and comfort at a time when travel was still difficult and dangerous. The train was originally developed in 1883 by Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits as a standard international passenger service. For more than a century the Orient Express has operated over a variety of routes under a number of different managements. The passengers in Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* are traveling from Istanbul to Calais via Sofia, Belgrade, Venice, Milan, Lausanne, and Paris.

In 1934, when Christie wrote her novel, the Orient Express was at the height of its popularity. The years following World War I had seen the line develop its reputation for intrigue and opulence, with exclusive sleeping cars and elegant dining cars renowned for their fine cuisine. Royalty, nobility, diplomats, businessmen, and wealthy bourgeoisie were frequent patrons.

Passengers boarding in Istanbul would first dine at the Pera Palas Hotel, established specifically to cater to Orient Express clientele. The train departed from Sirkeci Station every evening at 10:00 p.m. The train was very short, consisting of just four elegant blue-and-gold sleeping-cars, with a baggage van at either end. Each sleeping-car had ten wood-paneled compartments with a single bed that converted to a sofa during the day and an additional fold-down bed above. Each compartment contained a washbasin, but there were no baths or showers on board. The very wealthy could afford sole occupancy, but single passengers usually shared with another passenger of the same sex. The dining car was attached at the Turkish-Bulgarian border, in time for breakfast. The journey from Istanbul to Paris took three days.

In 1971, after years of declining revenues, the Wagon-Lits company sold all its carriages, which were run by other companies through 1977. Since then, several companies have operated various kinds of services under the name Orient Express. Today you can take the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, with beautifully restored vintage coaches providing a five-star luxury train experience between London and Venice. The 24-hour trip runs once a week from March to November. Tickets are available from \$4,813 per person one way, including meals.

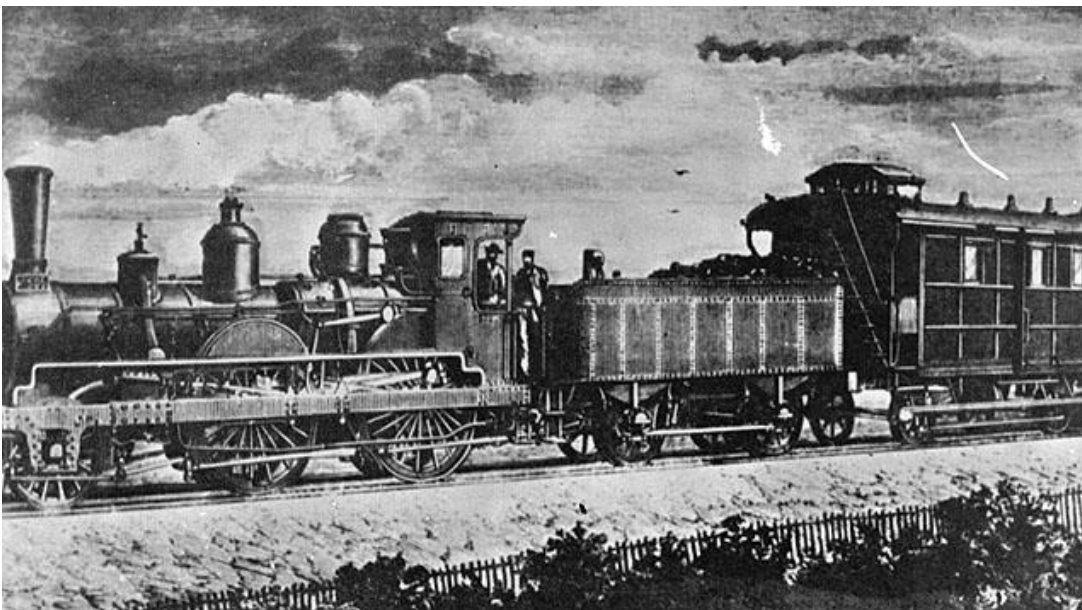


Photo of the Orient Express, 1884.

## THE QUEEN OF CRIME, THE DUCHESS OF DEATH

Agatha Christie is the world's best known writer of mystery fiction. She wrote some 80 books and 19 plays, and her work has been translated into 103 languages. More than 150 movies and television programs have been adapted from her works.

In the golden age of the English detective story, Christie was the genre's leading author. The years between the two World Wars were times of great change in Britain. A depression crippled the economy. The nation's dominance as a global empire was crumbling. Moral standards, social customs, and hemlines were changing. The wealthy found it increasingly difficult to hire household servants, and ever more challenging to afford those they could find.

Christie wrote of a stable, serene, old-fashioned world that readers fondly recognized: elegant country houses located in quaint rural villages were populated by large extended families and close-knit communities of quirky, eccentric characters. Class distinctions were clearly maintained. Christie's work avoided politics and other controversial topics, focusing on the niceties of social interaction and good manners. The intrusion of a murder into such portraits of stability and comfort only added to the appeal. The victim often turned out to be a disagreeable person who would not be missed, while the careful deduction of clues and the ultimate arrest of the murderer reinforced the propriety and stability of the social system. (While the elegant, luxurious, and very European setting of *Murder on the Orient Express* is a definite departure from Christie's typical country estate setting, the book otherwise follows most of the author's usual patterns.

Although her villains may have used extremely complicated plans, they were not impossible fictions, but were firmly grounded in everyday reality. Christie's books allowed readers to feel as if they were exercising their brains while being entertained. If the careful reader, studying the clues, guessed the solution, he was proud of himself; if not, he was impressed by the author. Either way, the reader had a good time.

Christie's world view was conservative and rational, but there was always a place for accidents. In 1937's *Dumb Witness*, she wrote,



“Does it not strike you that the easiest way of removing someone you want to remove from your path is to take advantage of accident? Accidents are happening all the time. And sometimes—they can be helped to happen!”

Joan Hickson as Miss Marple  
in the PBS series.

David Suchet as  
Hercule Poirot  
in the PBS series.

Long after Christie's death, science fiction writer Brian Aldiss revealed that Christie once told him that she wrote her books up to the last chapter, and then decided who the least likely suspect was. She would then go back and make the necessary changes to "frame" that person. Christie was particularly renowned for her surprise "twist" endings.



Christie's greatest creation was the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, whom she featured in 40 novels. She also wrote 17 novels featuring Miss Jane Marple, an elderly spinster. Where Poirot's detective skills focused on logic and rational thinking, Miss Marple relied on her feminine sensitivity and empathy to solve crimes. Miss Marple was a typically English character, a lifelong resident of the village of St. Mary Mead. Neither Poirot nor Marple had any family life, but Poirot traveled a great deal. A former policeman, he had been forced to flee his native Belgium after the German invasion in 1914. Both characters were eccentric, but while Poirot was exotic and amusing with his egotism and his waxed moustache, Miss Marple was as comfortable and endearing as an old friend. She is thought to have been based on the author's grandmother. Christie is the only mystery writer to have created not one but two major detective figures.

Christie always gave a logical explanation for the crimes her villains committed, but she did not blame society: murder was not a sign of the degeneration of middle-class values. After the crime was solved, life continued happily. As her writing career continued over six decades, she remained aware of social change. "When I re-read those first books," she said in 1966, "I'm amazed at the number of servants drifting around. And nobody is really doing any work, they're always having tea on the lawn."

Agatha Christie is the best-selling novelist of all time, with a billion copies sold in English and another billion in other languages. She is the most widely published novelist of all time in any language, out-sold only by Shakespeare and the Bible. As the New York Times Book Review said, Christie "entertained more people for more hours at a time than any other writer of her generation."

## TEN TIPS FOR WRITING DETECTIVE FICTION

Ronald Knox was a mystery writer in the early part of the 20th century who belonged to the Detection Club, a society peopled by such legendary mystery writers as Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, G. K. Chesterson, and E. C. Bentley. His list was published in the preface to *Best Detective Stories of 1928-29*, which he edited.

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

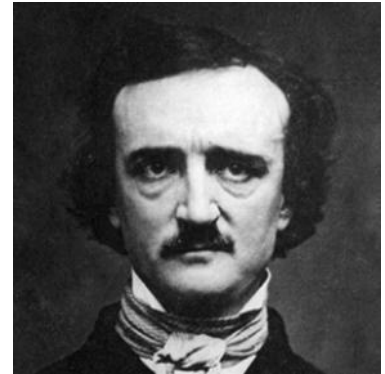
## Discovering More Detective Fiction

Besides Agatha Christie, here are a few of the best writers in the genre:

### Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Best known for his tales of the macabre and mystery, Poe was one of the early American practitioners of the short story. His classic “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) is considered one of the first detective stories.

Edgar Allen Poe



### Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)

Scottish author most noted for his four novels and fifty-six short stories about the detective Sherlock Holmes, which are generally considered a major innovation in the field of crime fiction. A brilliant London-based detective, Holmes is famous for his prowess at using logic and astute observation to solve cases. He is perhaps the most famous fictional detective, and indeed one of the best known and most universally recognizable literary characters.

### G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

English theologian who wrote 51 short stories featuring amateur sleuth Father Brown, a London parish priest with remarkable powers of deduction.

### Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957)

English writer best known for her novels and short stories set between WWI and WWII that feature amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey, who solved crimes with wit and style.



### Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961)

American author of hard-boiled detective novels and short stories. Among the enduring characters he created are Sam Spade (*The Maltese Falcon*, 1930) and Nick and Nora Charles (*The Thin Man*, 1934). A number of his books were the basis for great films.

Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade  
in the 1941 film of Dashiell Hammett’s novel *The Maltese Falcon*.

### Raymond Chandler (1888-1959)

His influence on modern crime fiction has been immense, particularly in the writing style and attitudes that much of the field has adopted over the last 60 years. Along with Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, Chandler's Philip Marlowe has become synonymous with the tradition of the hard-boiled private detective in such novels as *The Big Sleep* (1939), *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), and *The Long Goodbye* (1953). Several of his books became classics of film noir.

### Rex Stout (1886-1975)

American writer best known as the creator of the larger-than-life fictional detective Nero Wolfe. An eccentric man with gourmet tastes, Wolfe solves crimes without ever leaving his luxury New York townhouse.

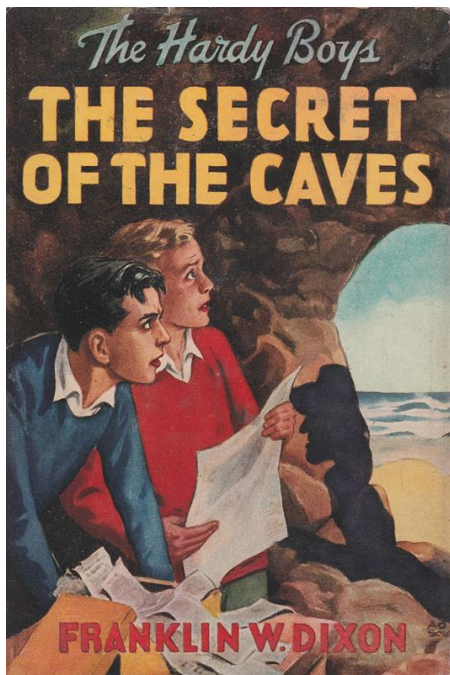
### Ellery Queen

Ellery Queen is both a fictional character and a pseudonym used by two cousins from Brooklyn, New York. In a successful series of novels that covered forty-two years (1929-1971), Ellery Queen was not only the name of the author, but also that of the detective-hero of the stories. Movies, radio shows, and television shows have been based on these works.

### Sue Grafton (born 1940)

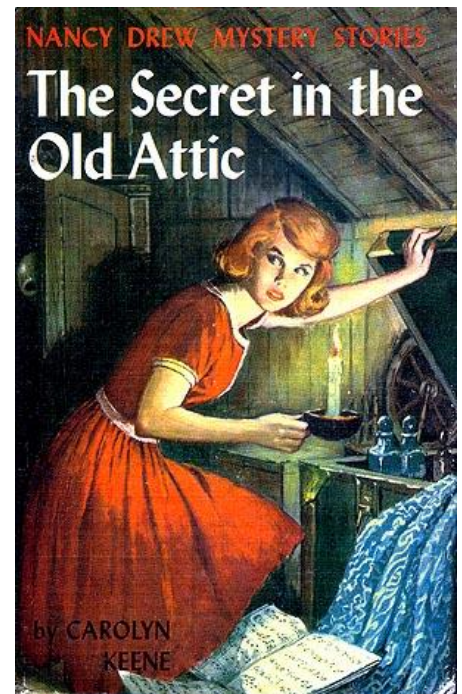
American author of detective novels written from the perspective of a female private investigator named Kinsey Millhone. Grafton's first book of this series is "*A*" is for *Alibi*, written in 1982. The series continues with "*B*" is for *Burglar*, "*C*" is for *Corpse*, and so on through the alphabet.

ALSO CHECK OUT:



*The Hardy Boys* is a popular series of more than 300 detective-adventure books for boys chronicling the fictional adventures of teenage brothers Frank and Joe Hardy, age 17 and 18. The first *Hardy Boys* book was published in 1927, and the series continues today.

*Nancy Drew* is the heroine of more than 175 mystery books; the series first appeared in 1930 and is still going strong. Nancy is an independent-minded 18-year-old. Besides participating in athletics and the arts, she maintains an active social, volunteer, and sleuthing schedule.





## THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:

Cell phones, tablets, watches, and other electronic devices should remain silent and dark during the performance. This is distracting to those around you and to the actors onstage.

Recording or photography of any kind is not allowed inside the theatre.

Gum, food and drink must stay in the lobby.

The house lights dimming signal the audience to settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors onstage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom during intermission or after the show.

Focus attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

When the show is over, you are welcome to applaud as a way to thank the performers.

Remain at your seat after the performance and IRT staff will dismiss your group to your busses if you are not staying for a post-show discussion.



Busses lining the IRT curb during a student matinee.

## STANDARDS ALIGNMENT GUIDE

We recognize that teachers aim to align their lesson plans with standards and that it is important to be able to align your experience at IRT with curriculum standards. Seeing IRT's production of *Murder on the Orient Express* is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of the text and key elements of US History. Some standards to consider on your trip would be:

### READING - LITERATURE

- RL.1 – Read and comprehend a variety of literature independently and proficiently
- RL.2 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by analyzing, inferring, and drawing conclusions about literary elements, themes, and central ideas
  - Sample: 9-10.RL.2.2: *Analyze in detail the development of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a work of literature, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.*
- RL.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view
  - Sample: 11-12.RL.3.2: *Analyze a work of literature in which the reader must distinguish between what is directly stated and what is intended (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) in order to understand the point of view.*
- RL.4 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

### READING - VOCABULARY

- RV.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying figurative, connotative, and technical meanings
  - Sample: 9-10.RV.3.3: *Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.*

### SPEAKING AND LISTENING

- SL.2 – Refine and apply reciprocal communication skills by participating in a range of collaborative discussions.
  - Sample 7.SL.2.2: *Investigate and reflect on ideas under discussion by identifying specific evidence from materials under study and other resources.*

### MEDIA LITERACY

- ML.1 – Develop and enhance understanding of the roles of media and techniques and strategies used to achieve various purposes.
- MS.2 – Analyze the purposes of media and the ways in which media can have influences.
  - Sample 7.ML.2.1: *Interpret the various ways in which events are presented and information is communicated by visual image-makers to influence the public.*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

What other mystery plays or movies have you seen? What elements of the mystery genre establish mood, tone, and atmosphere? What do you believe are the key ingredients of an engaging detective mystery?

### ACTIVITY

Compare and contrast several fictional detectives various authors have created. What are their differences and similarities? What, if any, are their idiosyncrasies? What makes them so engaging to readers that authors are able to write a series about them? Who are the interesting sidekicks these detectives have? Here are a few to get the discussion started and to spark further reading in this genre:

*Dog on It* (The Chet and Bernie Mystery Series) by Spencer Quinn

*Ghost Hero* (Bill Smith/Lydia Chin Novels) by S. J. Rozan

*Devil in a Blue Dress* (Easy Rawlins Mysteries) by Walter Mosley

*A Share in Death* (Duncan Kincaid/Gemma James Novels) by Deborah Crombie

*If Walls Could Talk* (Haunted Home Repair Mystery) by Juliet Blackwell

Agatha Christie's detectives Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot

### AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

Compare Agatha Christie's detective fiction with today's popular detective television series such as "Law & Order" or "C.S.I." How have changes in technology affected this kind of detective work? How is storytelling different in television from novels, short stories, and/or theatre?

Because *Murder on the Orient Express* takes place on a train, all of the characters are away from home (except M. Bouc and Michel, who work there). How does this displacement add tension to the plot? Where in the world today would make a good location for a murder mystery, and why? How could you use the unique qualities of this location to make your story more interesting?

Although murder is a horrifying crime in reality, it makes for very popular entertainment in fiction and drama. Why do you suppose we are fascinated by detective mysteries in all formats? Is it our desire to have a hero? Do we need the cause revealed so we can come to an understanding of the actions and thereby have peace of mind? What do you think?

How do issues of class become expressed in *Murder on the Orient Express*? Which characters are "higher" class and which are "lower"? Why? How does social class affect the characters' interactions? How do the issues of class as seen in this play, set in Europe in the 1930s, compare to class issues in America today?

From early on in the play, it seems clear that, whoever the killer is, the motive for the murder is a kind of vigilante justice. Having seen the play, how do you feel about Hercule Poirot's final decision regarding the identity of the murderer? Think of similar real-life cases where people have taken the law into their own hands. Is such action ever justified? Why or why not?

## WRITING PROMPTS

Readers enjoy the detective characters in mysteries such as Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, Nero Wolf, Easy Rawlins, Jim Chee, Jane Tension, Kinsey Millhone, Jessica Fletcher, Sherlock Holmes, and of course, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Try your hand at creating a contemporary detective of your liking. To develop a full character, ask and answer questions: Where and when does your character live? What are their -likes and dislikes? How did they get into this line of work? What are their dreams, nightmares, and aspirations? Family history? Often writers will give their detective character a significant personal obstacle, vice, or quirk: Sherlock Holmes uses drugs, Jane Tension is an alcoholic, Jim Chee has bad luck in love, and Hercule Poirot has numerous eccentricities. Perhaps your character could have a foible.

Write your own minute mysteries. Invent a fictional crime, then craft a series of clues that lead to the culprit. Write your story in a page or less, but leave out the solution. See if your friends can solve the mystery.

Observe a painting from a writer's point of view. Some choices could be Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*, Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, Renoir's *Le Moulin de la Galette*, or George Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. Write a paragraph describing the atmosphere, mood, and setting. Use sensory imagery such as smells and sounds of the location. What emotions are in the air? What might be the time of day? Set the scene for your readers and pull them into your world. Use the painting as a detective uses clues to create a story for what is happening in the painting.

We learn about characters from what they say, what they do, and from what other characters say about them. Choose one of the characters from *Murder on the Orient Express* and do a character analysis beginning with those three points. Then extrapolate more biographical information about your chosen character, such as age, gender, education, passions, aspirations, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams, work life, relationships, socioeconomic position, etc. Write a poem or story from your chosen character's point of view, imagining a different aspect of his or her life from that in the play.

Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting— as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors' performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: [education.irt@gmail.com](mailto:education.irt@gmail.com)

## CHRISTIE AND THE LINDBURGH CASE

The following resource is an excerpt from Harper Collins. Further information is available at [harpercollins.com](http://harpercollins.com).

*Murder on the Orient Express* is a thrilling mystery in which the famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot must solve the grisly stabbing murder of an American tycoon while traveling on a passenger train. While Christie's story is a wondrous work of fiction, the backstory for some of her characters can be found pulled from the headlines of American history.

Two years before the publishing of Christie's novel, the world was paralyzed with the shocking story of the kidnapping of the baby son of famous aviator Charles Lindbergh. The Lindbergh Kidnapping, as it came to be known, shocked the American public and had national coverage.

The kidnapping of Daisy Armstrong and the Lindbergh case would have seemed very similar to those reading *Murder on the Orient Express* when it first came out, and Christie has officially stated that the actual case gave her inspiration when writing this story.

### GROUP ACTIVITY

In a group of 3-4 students, research the Lindbergh kidnapping case in more detail. Draw parallels between the real case and the fictional one used in *Murder on the Orient Express*. When you are done researching, share your findings with the full class.

- What parallels do you see between the case and the story? What did Christie change? Why? Analyze the inspiration for the novel. It would be helpful to read reviews and analysis about the novel for this assignment. Students thinking about teaching as a future career often love this project.
- Now that you have research about the case, imagine you are a detective who is trying to bring the case to trial. Re-create the case. Present the Lindbergh case to the class as if you were a prosecutor summarizing the evidence against Bruno Richard Hauptmann and your classmates were the jurors.

### FEATURED RESOURCES

The FBI- <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/famous-cases/the-lindbergh-kidnapping>

The Lindbergh Case Author Jim Fisher- <http://jimfisher.edinboro.edu/lindbergh/intro.html>

PBS- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lindbergh/sfeature/crime.html>  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/tech/killed-lindbergh-baby.html>

The History Channel- <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/lindbergh-baby-kidnapped>

The State of New Jersey <http://www.state.nj.us/state/historical/it-happened-here/iuhnj-er-lindbergh.pdf>

Law School Examination of the Lindbergh Trial- <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/Hauptmann/Hauptmann.htm>

## EVERYONE LOVES A MYSTERY

The following resource is excerpted from ReadWriteThink as a part of the National Council of Teachers of English. Further information is available at <https://www.readwritethink.org> and the unit plan can be found in full at this link:

<http://new.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/everyone-loves-mystery-genre-796.html?tab=1#tabs>

### OVERVIEW

In this unit for grades 6 – 12, students examine story elements and vocabulary associated with mystery stories. Using Directing Learning-Thinking Activities, students will track these features as they read mystery books. This lesson can start with any mystery book that the teacher wants to use, or students can find a mystery story that they connect with or want to read. There are activities and projects that connect to this lesson that will add to students' understanding and appreciation of the mystery genre. At the end of the lesson, students will plan their own original mystery stories.

The lesson includes reference texts, online sites, and extension activities that allow teachers to customize the lesson to fit their classroom.

### STUDENT OBJECTIVES

Students will

- Research and examine the story elements and vocabulary of the mystery genre using multiple sites and reference texts
- Demonstrate an understanding of the structure and characteristics of the mystery genre by planning an original mystery story
- Identify and understand the structure of mysteries using story maps to solve mystery stories online and in class

In this lesson, students will learn about the mystery genre through discussion, exploration of online and text activities, and reading to create their own mystery story. In the first three sessions, teachers will review with students the mystery genre. Teachers will review with students general story elements and brainstorm elements of a story that are exclusive to mysteries. Teachers will reinforce this understanding through readings and DL-TA lessons which will expose students to more mystery stories and generate critical thinking skills.

The next five lessons will continue to reinforce student understanding of mystery story structure. In conjunction with online activities and handouts, students will begin to read a mystery story independently. Examples for this story could be the works of Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, Alfred Hitchcock, or Carolyn Keene.

The last group of lessons will challenge students to take their newfound knowledge of the genre and create a mystery story of their own. Using the Cube Creator from ReadWriteThink, students will plan their mystery stories in preparation for writing. While continuing to read and write/revise their stories.

At the end of the lessons, students will have completed both the story that they were reading and the story they wrote. Students can share their stories with the class or publish them online using Mystery Writing with Joan Lowery Nixon.

## BE YOUR OWN POIROT

While reading *Murder on the Orient Express*, readers begin to develop thoughts about who might be the killer and form their own theories regarding why. Like Hercule Poirot, we begin to hunt for clues and try to uncover the mystery!

As your students read *Murder on the Orient Express*, instruct them to fill out the following activity sheet for all of the passengers of the train to keep track of the information we've learned about each character. As your students continue further in the novel, they should be encouraged to continue taking notes and change their theories based on the information gathered.

## EXTENSION

In addition to filling out the activity sheets, students can create a visual flow chart of all of the characters and how to relate to each other. On a large sheet of paper, draw or find a photo that best represents each character of the story (remember, this novel takes place in the 1930s!). Students should write a short biography for each character and then draw arrows connecting them to each other. Along these arrows, encourage students to write how all of the characters are connected. This can be done at the end of the novel or as students are reading it. Encourage students to note how the relationships change. What do we learn? How does that effect the other characters involved?



Kenneth Branagh as Hercule Poirot in film adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express*, 2017

**BE YOUR OWN POIROT: ACTIVITY SHEET**

Passenger's Evidence

Sketch:

Name of Passenger: \_\_\_\_\_

Where was this suspect at the time of the murder?

\_\_\_\_\_

Does this passenger provide an alibi for another passenger, and if so, whom?

\_\_\_\_\_

Ties to the Armstrong kidnapping case: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Evidence provided (Add to over the course of the book):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Does this passenger's evidence confirm the evidence of another passenger? Explain.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Motive for killing Ratchett: \_\_\_\_\_

At the end of the interview, do you think this passenger is a potential suspect? Cite specific textual evidence to support your answer.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## PLAY GLOSSARY

### 13 Istanbul

Istanbul is the most populous city in Turkey and the country's economic, cultural and historic center. It is a transcontinental city in Eurasia, straddling the Bosphorus Strait. The city has long been a cultural melting pot and a crucial gateway between east and west, north and south.

### 13 Tokatlian Hotel

The Tokatlian Hotels were two prominent luxury hotels that opened in 1897 in Istanbul. They were among the first European-style hotels to be built in Turkey, and many famous people stayed there.

### 16 falafel

A Middle Eastern dish of spiced mashed chickpeas or fava beans formed into balls or fritters and deep-fried, usually eaten with or in pita bread

### 16 concierge

An employee of an apartment building or hotel who does errands for residents or guests

### 17 Wagon-Lit

Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits (English: International Sleeping-Car Company) was the premier provider of European railway sleepers and dining cars during the late 1800s and 1900s.

### 17 Scotland Yard

The headquarters of the Metropolitan Police Service in London

### 17 Lausanne

The capitol of Switzerland

### 18 berth

A fixed bed or bunk on a ship, train, or other means of transport.

### 18 Lord Byron

George Gordon Byron (1788–1824) was one of the leading figures of the Romantic movement. He is regarded as one of the greatest English poets and remains widely read and influential.

### 19 galleon

A large sailing ship in use (especially by Spain) from the 15th through 17th centuries, originally as a warship, later for trade. Galleons usually had three or more decks and masts.

20 brusque

Abrupt or offhand in speech or manner

24 Waldorf

A luxury Park Avenue hotel in New York, one of the world's most prestigious and best known

25 Balzac

Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) was a French novelist and playwright renowned for his multi-faceted characters; even his lesser characters are complex, morally ambiguous, and fully human.

26 the great mosaics in Ravenna

Ravenna, Italy, is known for its well-preserved late Roman and Byzantine architecture, with eight early Christian monuments on the World Heritage List, all with significant mosaics.

26 bee's knees

A popular expression from the 1920s, meaning excellent, surpassingly wonderful

26 snowing

Istanbul is at the northern edge of the Middle East, at approximately the same longitude as Fort Wayne, Indiana. It snows in Istanbul an average of six times a year.

26 lead on, Macduff

A very common misquotation from Macbeth. Shakespeare's line is "Lay on, Macduff."

28 two-bit

Insignificant, cheap, worthless; literally, 25 cents

29 godspeed

A wish for a good journey; from the Middle English "God spede you" ("God prosper you")

31 crisps

The British term for potato chips

34 Belgrade

At the time of the play, the capital and largest city of Yugoslavia

34 Sofia

The capital city and largest city in Bulgaria

## 42 Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia was a country in Central Europe from 1918 to 1992. Its borders contained what are now Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

## 42 Three Stooges

The Three Stooges performed in vaudeville and films from 1922 to 1970. They starred in 190 short films with Columbia Pictures, all featuring their signature slapstick comedy.

## 42 Zagreb

Today, the capital and largest city in Croatia. At the time of the play, Croatia was part of Yugoslavia.

## 45 “That is the question.”

Quoted from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Act III, scene 1.

## 46 spirit lamp

A small alcohol burner often used as lab equipment.

## 50 Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks were a revolutionary socialist political faction that formed in Russia in 1912, taking control of the country in 1917. They were the leaders of the revolutionary working class of Russia.

## 50 A Tale of Two Cities

A classic historical novel written by Charles Dickens in 1859, set during the French Revolution.

## ACT 2

## 62 Rudolf Friml operetta

Rudolf Friml (1879-1972) was a Czech composer of operettas. His most famous works include Rose-Marie and The Vagabond King, both of which originated on Broadway in the 1920s.

## 62 hold-all

A duffle bag with handles and a shoulder strap

## 66 meerschaum pipe

A meerschaum pipe with a stem that bends downward is often associated with Sherlock Holmes, but that association is due to the portrayal of Holmes by actor William Gillette, not to the original stories.

## 68 long-headed crime

Longheaded means “having unusual foresight.” A long-headed crime is one that has been carefully planned ahead of time.

## 71 mahjong

Mahjong is a tile-based game, commonly played by four players, that was developed in China during the 1800s. It arrived in the United States in 1922 and became very popular in the 1920s and 1930s.

## 81 Indian Army

The British Crown ruled the Indian subcontinent from 1858 to 1947. The British Indian Army was the principal military of the British Indian Empire from 1895 to 1947.

## 81 northern frontier

The Northern Frontier was the border between India and Afghanistan. For the duration of British rule in India, this region was conflict with local tribes, punctuated by three wars against Afghanistan. Many British officers learnt their soldiering on the Northern Frontier, which they called the Grim.

## 82 Calais

A port city on the northernmost coast of France

## 83 Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) co-founded the Cubist movement, in which simple geometric shapes and interlocking planes were used to create radically fragmented images.

## 85 Cyrillic alphabet

The alphabet used in many Slavic languages, including Russian. While some letters are unique to the Cyrillic alphabet, others are the same or similar to the Latin alphabet used in English.

## 91 St. James Square

A square in Westminster, an inner city in London, known for its club houses, the London Library, and Georgian architecture.

## 91 No, No, Nannette

A Broadway musical farce from 1925 about a young woman who runs away from her fiancé to a cottage for a weekend trip. It was one of the most popular shows of the 1920s.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS

selected mysteries by Agatha Christie

*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

*Peril at End House*

*Murder on the Orient Express*

*The ABC Murders*

*And Then There Were None*

*Five Little Pigs*

*Crooked House*

*A Murder Is Announced*

*Endless Night*

*Curtains*

*An Autobiography* by Agatha Christie

*Agatha Christie* by Laura Thompson

*The Mousetrap* and Other Plays by Agatha Christie

*A Is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie* by Kathryn Harkup

*Agatha Christie at Home* by Hilary Macaskill & Mathew Prichard

*Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making* by John Curran

*Agatha Christie and the Eleven Missing Days* by Jard Cade

*The Grand Tour: Around the World with the Queen of Mystery* by Agatha Christie

*Orient Express: The Story of a Legend* by Guillaume Picon

*The Orient Express: The History of the World's Most Luxurious Train 1883-1977* by Anthony Burton

*Orient Express: The Life and Times of the World's Most Famous Train* by E. H. Cookridge

### MOVIES

based on works by Agatha Christie:

*Murder on the Orient Express* (1974 & 2017)

*Witness for the Prosecution* (1957)

*Murder at the Gallop* (1963)

*Murder She Said* (1961)

*Murder Most Foul* (1964)

*Poirot* (PBS series, 1990-2013)

*Miss Marple* (PBS series, 1986-1989)

*Agatha* (1974)

*The Mystery of Agatha Christie with David Suchet* (PBS, 2014 – documentary)

*David Suchet on the Orient Express* (PBS, 2010 – documentary)

*Luxury Trains of the World: The Venice Simplon Orient Express* (2004, documentary)

Other detective series and films include:



*Castle* series (2009- )  
*The Departed* (2006 – rated R)  
*Veronica Mars* series (2004-2007) & film (2014)  
*CSI* series franchise (2000- )  
*Memento* (2000 – rated R)  
*L.A. Confidential* (1997 – rated R)  
*Law & Order* series (1990-2010)  
*Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988)  
*The Rockford Files* series (1974-1980)  
*Columbo* series (1971-2003)  
*Vertigo* (1958)  
*Rear Window* (1954)  
*The Third Man* (1949)  
*The Big Sleep* (1946)  
*Laura* (1944)  
*The Maltese Falcon* (1941)  
*The Thin Man* film series (1934-1947)

#### WEBSITES

[www.agathachristie.com](http://www.agathachristie.com)

[www.mysterynet.com/agatha-christie](http://www.mysterynet.com/agatha-christie)