



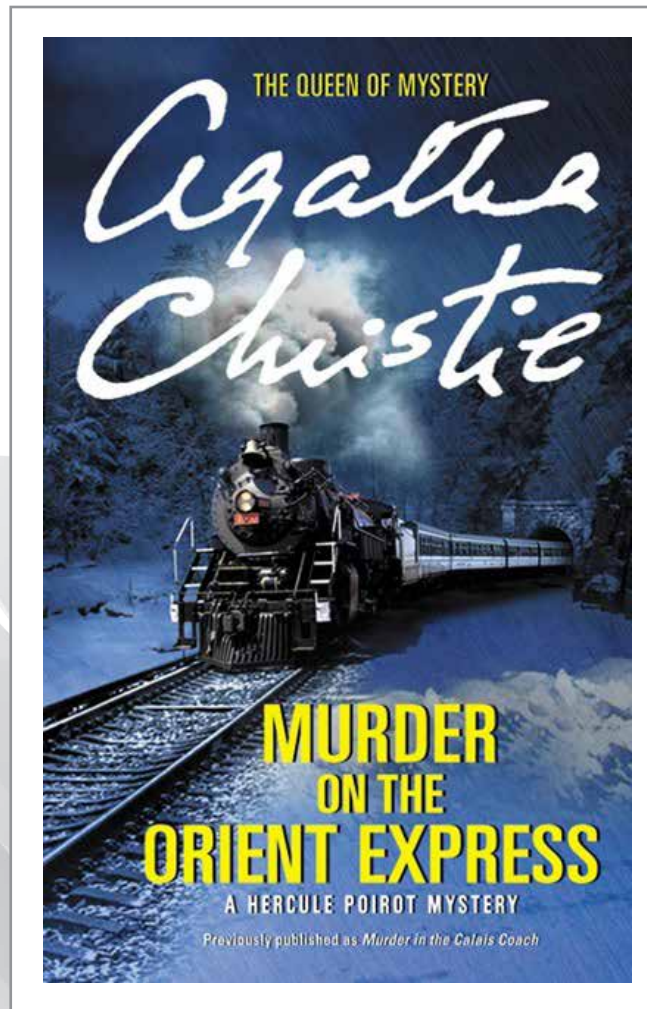
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Murder on the Orient Express

Agatha Christie



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Murder on the Orient Express

Agatha Christie

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

ISBN 978-1-50204-019-0

Copyright infringement is a violation of Federal Law.

© 2020 by Novel Units, Inc., St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from Novel Units, Inc.

Reproduction of any part of this publication for an entire school or for a school system, by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers, or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.

Novel Units is a registered trademark of Conn Education.

Printed in the United States of America.

To order, contact your
local school supply store, or:

Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

Table of Contents

Summary	3
About the Author.....	4
Characters	4
Initiating Activities.....	6
Seven Sections	7
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	25
Post-reading Extension Activities	27
Assessment.....	28
Scoring Rubric.....	38
Glossary.....	39

Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Analyzing, inference, research,
opinion, point/counterpoint,
prediction

Comprehension

Context, compare/contrast,
pros/cons, cause/effect

Literary Elements

Theme, symbolism, conflict,
characterization, traits of the
mystery genre

Vocabulary

Definitions, application,
synonyms, antonyms

Listening/Speaking

Presentations, reenactments,
discussion

Writing

Essay, poetry, first chapter,
research paper, news article,
synopsis, journal

Across the Curriculum

Literature—other works by
Agatha Christie, Armchair
Detectives, Locked Room
Mysteries; Civics—passports,
diplomats; Psychology—habits,
deductive methods; History—
Lindbergh kidnapping, sleeping
cars; Art—alternate cover,
painting, collage, music, film,
symbols

Genre: mystery

Setting: the passenger cars of the Orient Express, stuck in the snow in the Yugoslavian mountains

Point of View: third-person limited

Themes: death, revenge, truth, justice, morality

Conflict: person vs. society, person vs. person, person vs. nature

Style: an “armchair” murder mystery where deductions are made through conversations and interrogations

Tone: tense, harrowing, cloistered, analytical, methodical, sympathetic

Date of First Publication: 1934

Summary

While riding the Orient Express from Budapest to Paris, Hercule Poirot finds himself surrounded by an eclectic group of travelers from all over the world. When snow stops the train high up in the Yugoslavian mountainside, Poirot and the other passengers are forced to wait out the storm in close quarters. When a conductor finds a much-hated millionaire dead in his cabin, Poirot and the passengers realize they are not only trapped with each other, but with a murderer. Upon being given control of the investigation, Poirot inspects the dead man’s cabin and discovers the millionaire is an acquitted criminal from America, infamous for his involvement in the kidnapping and murder of a little girl, Daisy Armstrong. Poirot interviews passengers, asking them questions about the night of the murder as well as their pasts, revealing the true identity of the dead man to scrutinize their reactions. After inspecting each passenger’s belongings and hearing each one’s tale, Poirot retires to the dining car to think. Certain elements remain a mystery to him, so he begins to recall each passenger for a second interview where he traps them in lies. They begin to reveal more hidden clues from their pasts, and Poirot discovers that some of them are connected to the family of Daisy Armstrong, but each has an alibi supported by other passengers. Upon gathering all the passengers into the dining car, Poirot reveals one of two possibilities: that a murderer slipped onto the train during the night at the last stop, killed the man, and slipped off again before the train hit snow in the mountains. Dr. Constantine and M. Bouc, the two men chosen to judge the conclusions, find this absurd. Poirot then reveals a second possibility, the true conclusion that all the passengers were involved, having all been connected to the family of the dead child in one way or another. They each entered the room, stabbed the man once to avoid feeling totally culpable, and then covered for each other by providing alibis. When the passengers admit this is true, tearfully recalling the dead man’s cruel crimes and escape from punishment using bribes, Poirot leaves the final choice of the “correct” conclusion in the hands of M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine. The two men admit they prefer using the theory of an unknown murderer rather than sending all the heartbroken passengers to jail, seeing the murder of the child-killer as true justice served.

Part 1: Chapters 1–4

After solving a case for the French military in Syria, Hercule Poirot rides the Taurus Express to Constantinople (“Stamboul”) where he plans to take a short vacation. He discovers there are only two other passengers of note on the train, Colonel Arbuthnot and Mary Debenham, both British. They do not appear to know each other at first, but Poirot overhears them speaking in private, and the hushed tones reveal that they do know one another, something they cannot reveal until they are “out of all this” (p. 11). Mary Debenham also seems terribly worried about missing the connecting train in Constantinople. At his hotel, Poirot finds a telegram asking him to return to a case. Poirot secures a cabin on the Orient Express with the help of his friend, M. Bouc, the director of the train company who is traveling on the same line. Poirot sees Mr. Ratchett at dinner and feels there is a “wild animal...savage” behind Ratchett’s eyes. M. Bouc is surprised by how many people are on the train and how diverse the passengers are. Ratchett approaches Poirot, hoping to hire him because he fears someone will try to kill him. Poirot declines because he dislikes Ratchett and later discovers other passengers do too. Poirot wakes at night hearing a moan or a cry and then hears someone moving around in Ratchett’s cabin. He looks out into the hall to see the conductor attending calls from numerous cabins and speaking to someone through Ratchett’s door. Thinking nothing of this, Poirot returns to sleep, noting the time at 23 minutes to one.

Vocabulary

resplendent
surreptitious
altercations
peremptory
tyrannical
malevolence
munificent
swarthy
autocratic
demurred
coquetry
slipshod

Discussion Questions

1. What do people think of Hercule Poirot when they first see him? How do you think Poirot uses these assumptions to his advantage? (*Many find Poirot peculiar-looking, and he strikes Mary Debenham in particular as a “ridiculous-looking little man” with “an egg-shaped head,” the type of man “one could never take seriously” [p. 7]. Answers will vary, but students should note that if people do not take Poirot seriously, they will underestimate him and may say and do things in front of him that are more telling than they realize. Poirot accepts this and uses it to keep a low profile so he may observe others’ habits.*)
2. What conversation does Poirot overhear while walking outside the train? Why is this conversation peculiar? (*Poirot twice overhears Colonel Arbuthnot and Mary Debenham, two passengers who do not seem to know one another, speaking in a private, hushed tone. Arbuthnot says, “I wish to Heaven you were out of all this”*

[p. 11]. When he tries to speak to her again, Mary whispers, “Not now. When it’s all over” [p. 12]. These conversations are very peculiar because Debenham and Arbuthnot have made every effort to convince people they do not know one another, but their manner indicates that they do, and perhaps on a very personal level. It also suggests they are waiting for something very specific to happen before they can speak openly.)

3. What is Poirot’s initial reaction to Mr. Ratchett? How does he know this is a common reaction? (*He does not like the man right off, seeing a “strange malevolence” in the first glance Ratchett gives him. He tells M. Bouc that he gets a savage feeling from Ratchett. Poirot discovers this reaction is common when M. Bouc says Ratchett left him with an “unpleasant impression.” Mrs. Hubbard also pulls Poirot aside and says she is “dead scared” of Ratchett because there is something wrong with him.*)

4. Why does Poirot have so much trouble securing a cabin on the Orient Express? How is the situation resolved? (*Every first-class cabin is taken, which shocks M. Bouc because it is supposed to be a slow time of year. The conductor simply states that it is a fluke and “all the world elects to travel” [p. 20] that night. When pressed by Bouc, the conductor reluctantly admits there is one second-class berth available because a passenger did not arrive. Bouc insists the conductor give Poirot the missing passenger’s berth and later gives Poirot his own first-class cabin.*)
5. What peculiar situation does M. Bouc describe as he eats lunch with Poirot? What do you think this discussion might foreshadow? (*Bouc is quite taken by the picture before him of “people, of all classes, of all nationalities, of all ages” riding the train at once. They are “brought together... [to] sleep and eat under one roof” [p. 26] seemingly at random. The situation delights Bouc, but Poirot has more inauspicious ideas when he sees the diverse group on the train. Answers will vary, but the discussion of the diverse group sleeping and eating together may foreshadow the group being trapped in the train for longer than expected. The discussion could also foreshadow a more suspicious reason for all those people being there at once than Bouc’s romantic vision for the meeting. Poirot even allows his mind to think of more murderous reasons for their presence.*)
6. What proposition does Ratchett make to Poirot? How does Poirot respond? (*Ratchett introduces himself to Poirot and says he has a job for the detective, a job that pays “big money.” He says he has many enemies and that he does not feel safe. He shows Poirot his pistol, yet insists on hiring the Belgian to protect him. Poirot declines the offer, saying he has enough money to satisfy his needs. When Ratchett pushes him further, Poirot says, “I do not like your face” [p. 34] and walks away.*)
7. What interesting story does Mrs. Hubbard tell Poirot about Ratchett and her own room? Why might this information be useful later? (*Mrs. Hubbard says that her room is connected to Ratchett’s by a private door, which she had to block because she heard him turning the handle. She also says she is afraid of Ratchett and would not be surprised if he turns out to be a murderer or a train robber. Answers will vary. Since there are two doors into Ratchett’s cabin, one through Mrs. Hubbard’s cabin and one leading into the hall, there are numerous ways in which a person might enter and escape from it.*)
8. What awakens Poirot? What does he see and hear when he looks into the hallway? (*A short cry or moan from Ratchett’s room next door awakens Poirot, startling him, and the sound of a service bell ringing gets him out of bed. Looking into the hallway, Poirot sees the conductor knocking on Ratchett’s door. A voice speaking French responds to the knock. The conductor scurries off to respond to another call, and Poirot returns to bed.*)
9. **Prediction:** How will Colonel Arbuthnot and Mary Debenham’s secretive association affect Poirot’s investigation?

Supplementary Activities

1. Using the Clue Log on page 29 of this guide, keep track of clues you think may be important as you read the novel. You may use the format of the Clue Log to continue recording clues in a notebook as you go along.
2. Research sleeping cars on trains, and write a brief essay about why such places might aid or hinder the commission of a crime, especially if the train were stuck in a storm. Be sure to use specific details from your research in your opinion essay.
3. As you read each chapter of the novel, write an entry in a journal that includes your reactions to characters, clues, and plot points. Be sure to write whom you think the murderer could be at the end of each entry. Continue this activity throughout the novel study.

Word Map

Synonyms

Antonyms

WORD

Definition in your own words

Used in a sentence

