The Body in the Library

Agatha Christie was born in 1890 in Devon, England. She was the youngest child of an American father and an English mother. Her father died when she was eleven and the young Agatha became very attached to her mother. She never attended school because her mother disapproved of it, and she was educated at home by her mother in a house full of books. As a young woman, Agatha was described as tall with reddish-gold hair, fun and bright company, although shy at times. She married Lieutenant Archibald Christie in 1914 and in 1919 gave birth to her only child, Rosalind. They divorced in 1928. Two years earlier, following the death of her mother, Agatha Christie had completely disappeared for ten days, adding real life mystery to fiction. She married again in 1930. She had a phenomenal literary career as a writer of crime stories. She published 66 novels, among them the classics The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926), Murder on the Orient Express (1934) and Death on the Nile (1937), 154 short stories and 20 plays. Her book sales are only surpassed by the Bible and the works of Shakespeare. In 1971, she was awarded England's highest honour, the Order of the British Empire. She died in January, 1976, and is buried in the churchyard in Chelsey, Oxfordshire, near where she lived.

Summary
The body of a young woman is found in the library of Colonel and Mrs Bantry. Mrs Bantry immediately calls in her old friend, Miss Marple, to investigate the crime. The body is identified as a dancer, Ruby Keene, who had worked at a nearby hotel and was in no way connected to the Bantrys. It is also discovered that the young lady had attached herself to a rich old man and his family and that he had been planning to adopt her and leave her money in his will. Soon afterwards, the body of another young woman is found in a burned-out car. She is thought to be a girl guide who had disappeared on the same day as the dancer. The crimes seem unrelated, but Miss Marple starts to investigate and finds a connection that enables her to solve the mystery. The old man's son-in-law and his secret wife, Josie Turner, had killed the two girls and made Ruby Keene appear to be the Girl Guide, and vice versa, in order to confuse the police and Miss Marple and give themselves an alibi. They had killed Ruby Keene in an attempt to secure the old man's money. Miss Marple discovers the truth and the couple are caught.

Chapters 1–2: One morning, the body of a young girl is found in the library of Gossington Hall, in the quiet village of St Mary Mead, England. The girl has been strangled. The hall belongs to a respectable couple, Colonel and Mrs Bantry, who have no idea who she is or how she got there. Mrs Bantry calls her friend, Miss Jane Marple, an elderly lady with a skill for solving murders, to help investigate the crime. The Chief Constable, Colonel Melchett, arrives and interviews Colonel Bantry, and then decides to visit Basil Blake, a flamboyant young man who lives nearby. He suspects the dead girl may be Blake's girlfriend. However, while he is talking to Blake, the girlfriend in question arrives.

Chapters 3–4: Melchett learns that a professional dancer, matching the description of the murdered girl, has gone missing from a hotel in Danemouth. Josie Turner, a relative of the dead girl and a work companion, identifies the body as Ruby Keene. Josie tells Miss Marple and Melchett that Conway Jefferson, an old invalid man, had called the police about Ruby's disappearance. Miss Marple is suspicious of Josie. Later, Colonel Melchett talks to the hotel manager, who says Mr Jefferson was interested in Ruby Keene, and Adelaide Jefferson, Mr Jefferson's daughter-in-law, confirms this.

Chapters 5–6: Melchett talks to Conway Jefferson and discovers that the old man was planning to adopt Ruby Keene and leave her 50,000 pounds in his will, and that his son-in-law, Mark Gaskell, and his daughter-in-law were not happy with the idea. Melchett and Superintendent Harper agree that this is a motive, but realise the two people have alibis.

Chapters 7–8: Miss Marple has a conversation with Adelaide Jefferson and Mark Gaskell. She learns that they didn't like Ruby Keene. They thought she was after
their father-in-law’s money and Mark Gaskell wanted her dead. The police are informed that a burnt-out car has been found with the remains of a body inside. The police assume the remains are those of a recently missing school girl, Pamela Reeves. The car, which may belong to George Bartlett, a guest at the hotel, had been set alight with petrol, and the police speculate as to whether the two crimes are connected. The police now have many suspects: Basil Blake, George Bartlett, Mark Gaskell, Adelaide Jefferson and Raymond Starr, a dancer at the hotel, but they all have alibis or do not have a motive.

Chapters 9–10: Mrs Bantry learns that Adelaide Jefferson has very little money and is worried about the future of her son. The police discover that Mark Gaskell doesn’t have any money either. Miss Marple announces that she knows who killed Ruby Keene, but will not say who it is at this stage. Mr Edwards, Conway Jefferson’s servant, says that he thought that Ruby Keene was trying to get Mr Jefferson’s money. He said he didn’t think she loved the old man and he thought that she might have had a secret lover.

Chapters 11–12: Miss Marple discovers that Pamela Reeves had told a friend that she was going to meet a man to do a film test on the night she died. She then talks to Basil Blake and he tells her he found Ruby Keene’s body in his house when he arrived home drunk. He decided to take the body and put it in Colonel Bantry’s library for a joke. The police arrive and arrest him for murder. Conway Jefferson tells his son and daughter-in-law that he is going to change his will. That night, someone tries to kill Jefferson in his bed, but the police are there and apprehend her. Miss Marple then sums up the case. The body in the library was not that of Ruby Keene, it was that of the young girl, Pamela Reeves. Mark Gaskell and Josie had married secretly one year earlier and they wanted to be certain of inheriting Mr Jefferson’s money. Mark killed Pamela, dressed her up in Ruby’s clothes, and left her in Basil Blake’s house. Josie killed Ruby and dressed her in Pamela’s clothes. Then she drove to a quarry in Bartlett’s car and set fire to it. Josie then tried to kill Mr Jefferson with a drug.

The Body in the Library is that there are nearly as many detectives, amateur and professional, as there are suspects. Even the young boy, Peter Carmody, Adelaide Jefferson’s son, provides Miss Marple with an important clue. Also, with so many distinguished detectives on the case, it is surprising that it is an unassuming old lady who eventually solves it.

The British class system: The novel was written in 1942, when the British class system was still rigidly defined. The upper classes considered themselves to be morally superior to those below them. It would be almost inconceivable at that time for a murdered girl, a dancer of lower class and possibly even lower morals, to be found in the house of a very distinguished Colonel of the British Army. Also, those in the upper class would have had a very low opinion (and at the same time were perhaps a little envious) of Basil Blake, his dubious job in the film business and his wild drunken parties.

Money: Money plays an important part in the book as the prime motive for the murders. However, this is not the only way it is represented. Ruby Keene is happy to play along with a rich old man in the hope of receiving money from him. Raymond Starr, a poorly paid dancer, invents the story that he is from a rich family in order to impress the rich Adelaide Jefferson, and Hugo Mclean, who no doubt loves Adelaide, could also have been attracted to her because he himself has very little money. In contrast, Conway Jefferson has money but has lived a very sad life. As such, it is of little consequence to him.

Discussion activities
Before reading
1 Research: Ask the students to choose a murder mystery and look for information about it using the Internet. Where and when does the murder happen? Who is murdered? How are they murdered? Who is the murderer? Why is the person murdered? Is there an unexpected ending? Put the students in groups and ask them to tell each other the stories and to choose their favourite.

Chapters 1–2
While reading (p. 4, after ‘Perhaps, sir, you would like to see for yourself.’)
2 Guess: Ask the students to discuss in pairs what they think the body looks like.
Is it a man or woman? Young or old? Good-looking or ugly? How was the person killed? Is the person a relative, a friend or a stranger to the Bantrys?
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After reading
3 Write and guess: Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short part (3 or 4 sentences) from Chapters 1–2. Tell them to rewrite it, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their sentences to the other students, who have to identify the mistakes.

Chapters 3–4
While reading (p. 20, after ‘Miss Turner, I would like you to come with me to Gossington Hall.’)
4 Role play: Put the students into pairs. Student A is Colonel Melchett and Student B is Josie Turner. Student A makes a list of questions to ask Student B. Some questions should be from the text and some invented. Student A then interviews Student B. Encourage students to pretend this is a real police interview.

After reading
5 Write, ask and answer: Write ‘When was the girl killed?’ on the board and elicit the answer (Between ten o’clock and midnight). Now tell students to write similar questions about Chapters 3–4. Students then mingle with each other, asking and answering each other’s questions.

Chapters 5–6
While reading (p. 40, after ‘There are signs of a burnt body inside.’)
6 Predict: Write the following names on the board: Josie Turner, Basil Blake, Dinah Lee, Mark Gaskell, Miss Marple. Ask students to predict in small groups who the person in the car might be. They must give reasons and try to reach an agreement.

Chapters 7–8
Before reading
7 Discuss: Tell the class to imagine the murder has happened in the present day. A fingernail of the dead girl has been found. Then ask them to discuss the following questions:
What information could the police get from the fingernail and how? Would the information be enough to put someone in prison for the murder? What other things do the police usually do or look for to get information about a crime?

After reading
8 Pair work: Write the following adjectives on the board: attractive, stupid, nasty, kind, boring, cruel, nice, nervous. Elicit more adjectives to describe someone’s personality and write these on the board. Check the students understand all the words. Ask students to discuss which of these adjectives can be used to describe Mark Gaskell, Adelaide Jefferson, Basil Blake, George Bartlett, Raymond Starr and Josie Turner, giving reasons for their choices. Get feedback from the whole class. As a follow-up, students could choose adjectives from the list to describe themselves.

Chapters 9–10
While reading (p. 69, after ‘You mean you know now who killed Ruby Keene?’)
9 Predict: Put the students into small groups and ask them to guess who they think killed Ruby Keene. Consider the following questions: Who had the strongest motive? Who had the opportunity? Who had the character to kill someone?

After reading
10 Vocabulary game: Put the following categories on the board: Parts of the body, family members, colours, time expressions, something found in a house or garden, clothes. Put the students in pairs. Tell them they have ten minutes to look back at Chapters 9–10 and find as many words as they can in each category. The pair with the longest list wins.

Chapters 11–12
After reading
11 Discuss: In small groups the students discuss the following questions about the book.
Did you like the book? Why/why not? Did you think it had a good story? Was it too complicated? Could you guess the ending and if so what made you guess correctly? Which character did you like the most/the least? Why do you think Miss Marple solved the crime and not the professional policemen?

12 Research: Ask students to find information from the Internet about another Agatha Christie book or a film adaptation. Students then compare information and say which one they would like to read or see and why.

13 Discuss and write: Tell the students that a dead woman has been found near where they live. Nobody knows who she is. The following is known: The woman had been strangled with a man’s belt. She was found in a park. Her handbag contained a book of matches from Jack’s Bar with a phone number written on it, a purse with some foreign money inside, and a diary with the words, ‘Meet Laura 10 p.m.’ written under yesterday’s date.
In pairs the students imagine they are detectives and they discuss and write about how they would try and identify the woman and find her killer.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word list and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.