A Murder is Announced

Agatha Christie

About the author
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. 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 had completely disappeared for ten days, adding real-life mystery to fact. She married again in 1930. She had a phenomenal literary career as a writer of crime stories and 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 Cholsey, Oxfordshire, near where she lived. For more information see the Introduction to the book or the official website www.agathachristie.com.

Summary
Chapters 1–3: On Friday morning, October 29th, the local newspaper, the Gazette, is delivered to the neighbours of Chipping Cleghorn. Among those neighbours are Mrs Swettenham and her son Edmund, Mrs Easterbrook and her husband Colonel Easterbrook, Miss Hinchcliffe and her friend Miss Murgatroyd and the Reverend Julian Harmon and his wife Bunch. All of them are very surprised to read an advertisement announcing a murder at 6.30 p.m. that very evening at a house in the village known as Little Paddocks. The residents of Little Paddocks are also surprised as they read the newspaper over breakfast. These include Miss Letitia Blacklock, the owner, her young cousins, Julia and Patrick Simmons and her old school friend, Dora Bunner. Miss Blacklock thinks it's a joke but Dora is afraid. So is Mitzi, the foreign cook who believes that the Nazis are coming to murder her. Miss Blacklock, knowing that her neighbours will attend the 'function', prepares refreshments and heats the house in expectation. One by one they arrive and gather in the sitting-room. At precisely 6.30 the lights go out and a man enters the room shining a torch. He fires a gun twice and somebody screams. He then turns to leave, hesitates and a third shot is heard before he falls to the ground. Everybody is shocked and Miss Blacklock's blouse is covered in blood. She has been shot in the ear but is not badly hurt. The intruder, however, is dead. Colonel Easterbrook pulls off his mask and Dora Bunner recognises him as the young Swiss man who worked at the Spa Hotel in Medenham Wells. He had asked Miss Blacklock for money to get back to Switzerland but she had refused. Detective-Inspector Craddock is put in charge of the case and he goes to the hotel to ask about the Swiss employee, Rudi Scherz. He interviews the manager and then Rudi's girlfriend, Myrna Harris, but they can tell him very little. Then Craddock goes to Little Paddocks and interviews Miss Blacklock, who tells him what she believed happened on the night of the crime.

Chapters 4–6: Craddock continues to interview those present at the scene of the crime. He talks to Julia, who doesn't think the man was trying to shoot Miss Blacklock and then he talks to Mitzi, who rather hysterically thinks the police have come to torture her. As Craddock is about to leave, Patrick arrives and he interviews him. Then he goes to Dayas Hall to talk to Phillipa Haymes, a widow who works there but lives at Little Paddocks too. She explains how she arrived home just before the crime took place and entered through the unlocked side door. Craddock then visits all the neighbours who had been present on the night but none of them seem to have any idea about why the crime was committed. Some time later, the police go to see an old lady called Miss Marple, who is staying at the Royal Spa Hotel. She tells them that Rudi Scherz had altered one of her cheques in order to steal money. On her advice, Craddock talks again to Myrna Harris and finds out that Rudi had told her that somebody had paid him to act out a hold-up for a party. Craddock then goes to Little Paddocks again and talks to Mitzi, who
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this time says that she heard Rudi talking to Mrs Haymes in the garden about where to hide in the house. Craddock then tries to open one of the doors to the sitting-room but finds it locked. Miss Bunner explains that it usually is as they no longer use it. Craddock finds the key and opens it to discover that it has recently been oiled and used. He explains to Miss Blacklock his idea that somebody in the room that night had left by that door when the lights were out and had gone behind Rudi and fired the shots in order to kill Miss Blacklock. She explains that she can see no reason for this, not even for money as at the moment, she is not rich. Within a few weeks, however, she is due to inherit a lot of money from Belle Goedler, the wife of her old boss. On further questioning, Miss Blacklock explains that if she were dead, her boss’s nephew and niece, Pip and Emma, would inherit the money. Craddock then tells Phillipa Haymes what Mitzi has told him but she denies everything. Miss Marple goes to have tea at Miss Blacklock’s house and brings the conversation around to old photographs. She discovers that Miss Blacklock doesn’t have any of her cousins, who she had never seen until they came to stay with her. Could they be Pip and Emma in disguise?

Chapters 7–9: Edmund Swettenham asks Phillipa Haymes to marry him. She refuses saying that he doesn’t know anything about her. Meanwhile, Colonel Easterbrook discovers that his gun is missing. He is concerned that it could have been used in the shooting, but his wife tells him that the last time she saw it was the day after the hold-up. Miss Marple has coffee with Dora Bunner and Dora tells her about how kind Miss Blacklock has been to her. She also says that she suspects Patrick of being involved in the shooting and the oiling of the sitting-room door as she had found him in the garden with an oily cup and a feather some days earlier. Inspector Craddock travels to Scotland to meet Belle Goedler, who is weeks away from dying. She tells him that her dead husband had argued with his sister Sonia over the man she married. For this reason, he had decided his money should go to Miss Blacklock after his wife’s death. Belle had convinced him to name her sister Sonia’s son and daughter, Pip and Emma, as heirs in the case of Miss Blacklock’s death. Back at Little Paddocks, it’s Dora Bunner’s birthday. Mitzi makes her famous chocolate cake and the neighbours visit with presents. After the party Dora has a headache and takes some of Miss Blacklock’s aspirin before going to bed. Miss Blacklock tells Phillipa that she has left her a lot of money in her will. Julia, hearing this, is not very happy. Later on, Dora is found dead. The aspirin was in fact poisonous. Craddock visits Miss Blacklock and asks to see a photo of Sonia Goedler. There are some photo albums that she had been looking at with Julia a few days earlier, but when they find them, the pictures of Sonia have been removed. Craddock discovers that Phillipa’s husband hadn’t died but had deserted from the army. He accuses her of seeing him recently but she denies it. He then finds some letters from Letitia Blacklock to her sister, Charlotte and on reading one of them discovers a description of Sonia, which reminds him of somebody he knows. He then finds out that Phillipa’s husband has been killed in an accident. Meanwhile Miss Murgatroyd remembers that a certain woman wasn’t in the room on the night of the hold-up.

Chapters 10–12: Miss Hinchcliffe arrives home to find that Miss Murgatroyd has been murdered and a letter arrives at Little Paddocks from Julia Simmons, saying she’s coming to visit. Miss Blacklock discovers that the girl who is staying in her house is not really Julia but Emma. Emma says that she has not seen her brother Pip since she was three and that when she had found out that her uncle’s money was to go to Miss Blacklock, she had decided to befriend her in the hope of getting some of that money. She denies shooting at her, however. Miss Blacklock breaks her pearl necklace and is unusually upset by it. Meanwhile Bunch informs Craddock that Miss Marple is missing. After dinner that night, Craddock questions various suspects at Little Paddocks. Laura Easterbrook originally says she was with her husband but he denies it. Then Mitzi runs into the room saying that she saw Miss Blacklock with the gun in her hand on the night of the hold-up. Phillipa then admits that she is actually Pip, who isn’t a boy but a girl, and that she had also tried to befriend Miss Blacklock in the hope that she would get some money. Mitzi goes back into the kitchen and Miss Blacklock follows her and tries to drown her in the sink. Miss Marple appears and fakes the voice of Dora Bunner to stop Miss Blacklock. She then explains that Miss Blacklock is not actually herself but her sister Charlotte and the pearls she always wore were to hide the scars from an operation. Charlotte says she never intended to kill anybody, Miss Marple and Craddock then explain the whole story. Charlotte had gone with her sister Letitia...
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to Switzerland to have an operation. They stayed there for some time and Letitia suddenly became ill and died. Charlotte, knowing about the inheritance, pretended to be her sister and went back to England. When Dora appeared on the scene, she told her everything. When Rudi appeared and recognised her as Charlotte, she decided to kill him through arranging what he thought was a joke hold-up. Then Dora started to become a liability because she was becoming more forgetful and likely to reveal Charlotte’s real identity. Charlotte realised she had to kill her. Then she killed Miss Murgatroyd when she overheard her say that she had seen she wasn’t in the room on the night of the crime. Miss Marple had discovered all of this and had set Miss Blacklock up by getting Mitzi to pretend she had seen her with the gun. She then witnessed the attempted murder and heard Miss Blacklock’s confession.

Background and themes

Murder mystery: As in nearly all Agatha Christie’s novels, the main theme is murder and its subsequent resolution. There are a large number of suspects, each with a motive or an opportunity and many clues. Miss Marple manages to solve the mystery because she is clever enough to see the things that others, including the police, often fail to see.

Money and greed: The main suspects are believed to have a motive for killing Miss Blacklock because they want to get their hands on her inheritance. In the end, however, it’s Miss Blacklock herself who will do anything, even sacrifice her dear friend Dora, in the pursuit of money.

Small village life: Chipping Cleghorn represents a typical English village full of different and sometimes eccentric characters. All the neighbours know each other, nobody locks their doors before dark and everybody gets involved in any event that occurs. Under the surface, however, things and people may not be what they seem.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1  Pair work and write: Write the word MURDER on the board and put students in pairs to brainstorm words related to murder. After two minutes stop and ask how many words each pair has. The pair with the most wins. Now, write all the words on the board and ask the students to choose one word and write a definition of it. Ask students to walk around the class, reading out their definitions and other students must guess the word.

2  Discuss: Put students in small groups to discuss the following question: What motives do murderers sometimes have? Get feedback from the whole class and then ask them to decide which one they think is the most common and why. Then ask if they know of any real-life cases or cases from films where this motive led to a murder. Then ask them to answer the following question: What kind of clues did the police find to help solve the murder?

Introduction

After reading

3  Pair work: Put students in pairs to answer the following questions: What kind of education did Agatha have? Do you think this is a good way to educate a child? How did she use her experience of the world in her books? Why do you think she was so successful?

Chapters 1–3

Before reading

4  Pair work: Put students in pairs to answer the following questions: What are the differences between local and national newspapers? What kinds of things do you normally see in the personal columns? What kind of newspaper do you read and how often? What parts of the newspaper don’t you read? Do you think different newspapers express different political ideas?

While reading (p. 3, after ‘I really do think it’s your duty, Archie.’)

5  Discuss: Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: What is a good neighbour? What annoying things can neighbours sometimes do? How do you get on with your neighbours?

6  Pair work: (after Chapter 1) Remind students that Miss Blacklock and Dora are old friends from school. Now put them in pairs to answer the following questions: Who were your best friends at school? Are they still your friends? Would you help them if they were in trouble?

7  Role play: (after Chapter 2) Divide the class into two groups, A and B. Ask students in Group A to think of reasons that Rudi could give to persuade Miss Blacklock to give him some money. Ask students in Group B to think of reasons Miss Blacklock could give to refuse him. Now rearrange the class so that a student from Group A is working with a student from Group B. Get them to role play the conversation these two people had.

8  Write: (after Chapter 2) Tell students to imagine they are journalists for the Chipping Cleghorn Gazette. Tell them they have to write an article about what happened at Little Paddocks. Encourage them to make it quite sensationalist.
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After reading
9 Pair work: Remind students that Sergeant Fletcher thought Mitzi was a liar and ask the students to discuss the following questions in pairs: In what situations do people often lie? When do you lie? Is it sometimes alright to lie? Get feedback and then tell them they are going to play a lying game. Tell each student to write a number between 1 and 5 in a secret place. Then write the following questions on the board: 1 What did you do last summer? 2 What are you going to do next weekend? 3 What sport or exercise did you use to do when you were a child? 4 What do you think about new technology? 5 If you could visit any country in the world, where would you go and why? Tell students that they have to ask their partner these questions and the partner must respond truthfully except in the case of the question that corresponds to the number they have written. The student asking the questions must guess when their partner is lying.

10 Group work: Write the names of the following characters on the board: Edmund Sweetchenham, Mrs Easterbrook, Miss Blacklock, Dora Bunner, Patrick Simmons, Dermot Craddock. Divide the class into groups and give one character to each group. Ask them to look back over Chapters 1–3 and write two true sentences and two false sentences about the character. Then rearrange the groups so that all the characters are represented in the new groups. Students read out their sentences and the others have to decide if the are true or false.

11 Pair work and debate: Ask students to discuss what they know about Chipping Cleghorn with a partner. Get feedback and then ask them to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of living in a small village as opposed to a big city. You can then set up a class debate about which is the best place to live.

Chapters 4–6
Before reading
12 Guess: Put students in pairs to talk about which of the other characters in the book might be involved in the crime with the exception of Rudi Scherz. Get feedback from the whole class.

While reading
(p. 33, after ‘Well, Miss Marple, you’ve certainly given us something to think about.’)
13 Pair work and write: Ask students to discuss what they know about Miss Marple in pairs, saying whether they think she is a typical old lady or not and why. Remind them that Agatha Christie partly based her character on her own grandmother and then ask them to talk about one of their grandparents or another old person they know well or think is unusual. As a follow-up, have them do a piece of writing describing this person.

14 Discuss: (p. 35, after ‘You say I am a poor foreign girl who lies.’) Elicit from the students why they think Mitzi is living in England. Then put them in groups to answer the following questions: Do a lot of foreign people come to your country to work? What are the most important reasons why do this? What problems can they sometimes have? Would you consider going to a foreign country to work? Where would you go?

15 Discuss: (p. 40, after ‘But nobody knows anymore who anyone really is.’) Remind students that Miss Marple has remarked on how much villages like Chipping Cleghorn have changed over the last 15 years and then ask them to discuss in small groups how much the place that they live has changed in 15 years. You could also extend the discussion to life in general e.g., eating habits, leisure time, work, education, technology, roles of men and women etc.

After reading
16 Pair work: Elicit from the students the motives that Pip and Emma would have to kill Miss Blacklock. Then ask them to discuss the following questions: How important is money in modern day society? Does it sometimes become too important in your opinion?

17 Discuss and role play: Remind students that Randal Goedler had fallen out with his sister because he didn’t approve of the man she was going to marry. Ask them to talk in small groups about the types of things that normally cause arguments in families. Get feedback from the whole class and then divide the class into two groups, A and B. Tell Group A that they have to make a list of complaints that teenagers normally have about their parents. Tell Group B that they have to make a list of complaints that parents normally have about their teenage sons or daughters. Now rearrange the class so that a student from Group A is working with a student from Group B. Get them to act out a conversation between parent and teenager in which both are trying to make their points.

Chapters 7–9
While reading
(p. 39, after Chapter 7)
18 Pair work: Write the following words on the board: honey, apples, swing, furniture, feather. Put the students in pairs to discuss and write about how these words were significant in Chapter 7.

19 Write: (p. 51, after ‘He wasn’t happy about it but he did do that.’) Tell the students to imagine they are Sonia and to write a letter to Belle. Tell them to include things about her husband, her newborn children, the place where she lives and how she feels about the argument that she had with her brother.
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20 **Pair work:** (p. 54, after ‘But I really think she’s enjoyed herself!’) Put students in pairs to answer the following questions: *How do you usually celebrate your birthday? Can you remember one special birthday when you really enjoyed yourself? Do you usually get a lot of presents?*

21 **Write:** (p. 57, after ‘There was a birthday party for Miss Bunner.’) Tell the students to pretend they are journalists for the *Chipping Cleghorn Gazette* again. Tell them they have to write an article about what happened to Dora Bunner. Encourage them to make it quite sensationalist.

22 **Discuss:** (at the end of Chapter 8) Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *What did Belle Goedler think of Miss Blacklock? Why was Belle afraid at the end of the meeting with Craddock? Why did Dora go to bed after the party? What did Miss Blacklock tell Phillipa? What did Miss Marple notice about the lamp in Miss Blacklock’s sitting-room? What did Craddock want Julia to show him?*

23 **Role play:** (p. 63, after ‘You’d better go and tell her.’) Tell students they are going to role play the conversation between Craddock and Phillipa Haymes. Tell them that Craddock is first going to challenge her about the lie she had previously told him (about not having seen her husband for years). He will also tell her how brave her husband was in the end and Phillipa must react to these things. If you think it’s better, let them write out the dialogue first and then act it out for the other students.

**After reading**

24 **Write, ask and answer:** On the board, write *What was missing from the Easterbrooks’ drawer?* Elicit the answer (a gun). Now tell students to write similar questions about Chapters 7–9. Students then ask and answer each other’s questions.

**Chapters 10–12**

**Before reading**

25 **Guess:** Explain to students that Miss Marple disappears in the next chapter. Ask them to predict in pairs what might have happened to her.

**While reading** (p. 68, after ‘It makes a lot of difference.’)

26 **Pair work:** Focus students on the sentences ‘She wasn’t there’ in which the stress changes. Get them to read out the sentences in pairs and talk about how the different stress may be significant. Get feedback from the class.

27 **Guess:** (p. 72, after ‘Would they be worth murdering someone for?’) Ask students to talk in pairs about why they think Miss Blacklock might be so upset about the broken pearls. Get feedback from the whole class.

28 **Guess:** (p. 77, after ‘I see Miss Blacklock.’) Ask the students: *If Mitsui is right and it was Miss Blacklock who had the gun, what could her motive have been?* Get them to discuss their answer in pairs and get feedback from the whole class.

**After reading**

29 **Discuss:** Put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *Do you think Charlotte Blacklock did a bad thing when she went back to England and pretended to be her sister? Do you think Emma did a bad thing pretending to be Julia? Do you think Phillipa did a bad thing by not saying who she really was? Who was the worst person of the three and why?*

30 **Write and guess:** On the board, write *The murderer pulled a rope tight around Miss Murgatroyd’s neck.* Elicit which word is wrong from the students (a scarf not a rope). Now students choose a sentence from Chapters 10–12 and rewrite it changing one word. Students walk around the class, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

31 **Game:** Explain the word ALIBI and tell the students that a murder took place yesterday afternoon between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. Tell two of the students that they are suspects and ask them to leave the room to talk about their joint alibi. Tell them they must discuss all the details about what they were doing together at that time. Now tell the rest of the class that they are police officers and have them write questions in pairs that they would like to ask the suspects. Get the suspects to come back into the class one at a time to be questioned. The ‘police officers’ have to see if there is any difference in what they say. If there is, they are guilty.

32 **Game:** Divide the class into teams and ask each team to write five questions about any part of the book. When they have finished, each team reads out their questions and the others write their answers on a piece of paper. The team with the most correct answers in the end wins.