Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie

On a three-day journey through the snowbound Balkan hills, Hercule Poirot must weed through an array of international suspects to find the passenger who murdered a gangster on the Orient Express.

Why you'll like it: Mystery classic. Suspenseful. Intricately plotted.

About the Author: One of the most successful and beloved writer of mystery stories, Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie was born in 1890. She wrote her first novel, The Mysterious Affair at Styles, in 1920, launching a literary career that spanned decades. In her lifetime, she authored 79 crime novels and a short story collection, 19 plays, and six novels written under the name of Mary Westmacott. Christie died in 1976. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Were you able to solve the mystery before Poirot did, or were you surprised when Poirot revealed the culprits?

2. The setting of the novel involves a passage from Syria to London, with all passengers onboard having spent time in the Middle East. In today’s world, widespread tourism in the Middle East seems highly unlikely. Contrast the social/political climate in the countries, Turkey, Serbia, Syria, Persia (now Iran/Afghanistan), of 1933 with today.

3. How is the diversity of American society shown through the passengers? How does this diversity create an interesting and unusual case for Poirot?

4. One issue that is alluded to in the Christ’s novel is the role that prejudice and profiling play in criminal investigation. M. Bouc, in particular, is quick to assign characters guilt or innocence based on what he perceives as the characteristics of their nationality. What steps have been taken to end racial profiling today? What still needs to be done?

5. Why did Agatha Christie set the murder on a train? What does the train symbolize in the novel?

6. The motif of the dragon is mentioned several times in the novel. What does this motif symbolize or suggest?

7. How does Murder on the Orient Express differ from other murder mysteries? What format rules does it break? Why is it unique?

8. Agatha Christie based parts of her novel on the real life kidnapping case of Charles Lindbergh. What are the similarities and differences between the true crime story and the fictional Armstrong kidnapping?

9. Name two comedic characters in Murder on the Orient Express. How are they comedic and how do they

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help propel the plot?

10. How are working-class people portrayed in the novel? What differences do you see between working-class and non-working-class individuals?

11. Daisy Armstrong, despite the fact that she never appears in the book, is one of the most important characters. How does her death affect all those around her?

12. Before she is revealed as Linda Arden, what behaviorl or descriptions might indicate Mrs. Hubbard is an actress?

13. What is the difference between revenge and justice?

14. Were the murderers justified in killing Mr. Ratchett?

15. Why did Poirot choose not to report the crime and punish the criminals?

(Questions provided by Madison Library District)