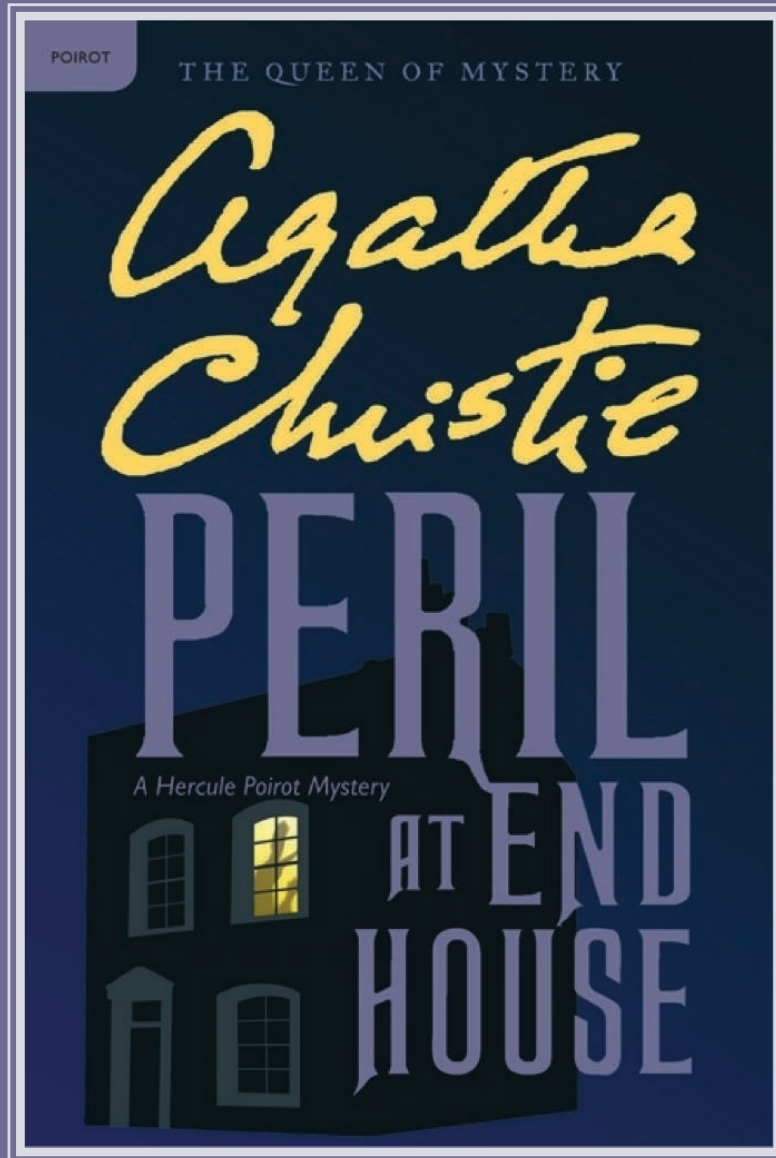


A TEACHER'S LESSON PLAN FOR



BY MS. ANNMARIE BYRNES, M.A.

*Wm*  
MORROW

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## Note to Teachers

The study of Agatha Christie's stories and novels is quite suitable for grades 7 through 12, depending on the abilities of the students and the curriculum of the class. These lessons can easily be adapted to work for different grade and ability levels. The lessons are student-centered, aligned to the common core, and engaging for students to complete.

In middle school (grades 7 to 8), the short stories are a fine entry into the world of Mrs. Christie's mysteries. Teachers can use the stories and novels to teach the elements of the fiction, literary terminology, and vocabulary.

High school students (grades 9 to 12) can graduate to the novels. The novels' suspenseful stories, full of dialogue and characterization, pull even reluctant readers into the world of mystery fiction. The clues and suspects encourage readers to read closely, searching for evidence to solve the mystery. Informational text is a key corollary to the novel, as the teacher encourages additional research on the part of the students to aid in their understanding of the intricate plot and past settings. Historicism encourages research.

I have successfully used Christie's stories and novels in 9th-grade English (both college preparatory and honors) and in 12th-grade World Literature (all levels and ESL). Even within a specific class, individual students have different abilities and interests. Christie's books provide many topics, ideas, settings, and detectives. Choose the story that will engage your students in reading, so that they read along with your lessons and participate happily in solving the book's mystery.

*Peril at End House* is an excellent novel for teens. It is set at a seaside resort, has younger characters in their 20s, involves a devious illegal drug subplot, and includes greed, betrayals, friendships, and secrets. These elements combine to make the novel accessible to teen students.

The methods, activities, and projects in this lesson support the common core standards. Choose the work for your students to do which will support the standards you need to emphasize. The standards are at the end of the lesson and also at [www.corestandards.org/the-standards](http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards).

My students have access to wireless tablet computers and cell phones in class, and, therefore, I integrate technology into my lessons. Adapt these activities to your class situation. If you can, let students bring their own devices if you don't have school computers. Don't be afraid of cell phones! Students can use them as educational devices to read the book, research online, ask questions, send work, make projects, etc. As I say, it's a tool, not just a toy. Keep them busy, and the students will have little time to play on their phones. —AnnMarie Byrnes

## About This Plan's Author

AnnMarie Byrnes holds a B.A. in English and Fine Arts from St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia and a M.A. in English from Rutgers University in Camden, NJ. She has taught English since 1980 at Holy Cross Academy, a private high school in New Jersey, and has served as English department chair. Chosen as Teacher of the Year in 2006, she teaches Honors and Advanced Placement English. Her A. P. English classes earn college credit from Rowan College at Burlington County and Seton Hall University.

## Introduction

### A. FICTION

Review the elements of a story with the class, using a story or novel the students have previously studied with you.

#### Elements of a Story

- Exposition
- Characters
- Conflicts: external and internal
- Rising action
- Climactic scene
- Falling action
- Epilogue
- Prologue
- Themes
- Symbols
- Irony

Have the students create a plot graph or graphic organizer showing their understanding of a story. This can be done collectively or in a group of 2-5 students to aid in review. If the work is done on paper, hang the samples on the bulletin board for future reference. If the work is completed on computer, show the samples on the interactive white board.

### B. MYSTERY

Introduce the mystery as a subgenre of fiction. Have students create a recipe for a mystery, identifying how it differs from the larger category of fiction. The recipe is a good model for adding the elements of the mystery to the already known characteristics of a story. Have the students use their prior knowledge about recipes and mystery movies to help them understand the genre.

Show recipe examples to the class. Hang paper recipes on the classroom's bulletin boards.

#### Elements of a Mystery

- Detective
- Detective's partner
- Client
- Villain
- Crime
- Motivation
- Police
- Clues
- Red herrings
- Suspects
- Evil plan of the criminal
- Good plan of the detective
- Solution or outcome

### C. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduce the historical context of the author, Agatha Christie, and her works. Have students research online to discover and share information about the author, her books in general, this book in particular, her famous characters (detective Hercule Poirot, his partner Hastings, and their friend Inspector Japp of Scotland Yard), and the book's settings.

These tasks can be divided up between student groups. Students can use Google Earth to locate the settings and share maps and photographs in class. Reading informational text broadens the scope of the lesson beyond fiction.

- Life of Agatha Christie
- Books of Agatha Christie
- Geography of the novel
  - United Kingdom
  - Cornwall and the Majestic at St. Loo
  - The Solomon Islands and the Albatross (airplane)
- Hercule Poirot
- Captain Arthur Hastings
- Inspector Japp
- Life in England in the 1930s between the World Wars
  - Cars
  - Clothes
  - Servants
  - Gender roles
  - Class structure
  - Entertainment

## D. ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Discuss essential questions in class with the students before, during, and after reading the novel. At first, use examples from history and current events as well as personal experiences and observations. As the class progresses through the novel, use specific examples from the text to help make points. After finishing the book, use the essential questions to guide discussions and focus student attention on activities and projects (both during project creation and presentation).

- What is justice?
- How do we protect the innocent?
- What is the individual's responsibility to the community?
- How do choices and decisions shape character?
- Should people face the consequences of their actions?
- What is friendship?
- Who is a hero?
- What makes a hero?
- Are love and sacrifice two sides of the same coin?
- Is the world a utopia or a dystopia?
- Why is reading valuable?
- Why is writing valuable?
- Why is literature valuable?
- What is reality?
- Does fiction help us discover reality?
- Does evil exist?
- How do we punish the evil amongst us?
- How valuable is grit (or persistence) in life?
- What can we learn about ourselves by reading literature?

### Reading the novel *Peril at End House*

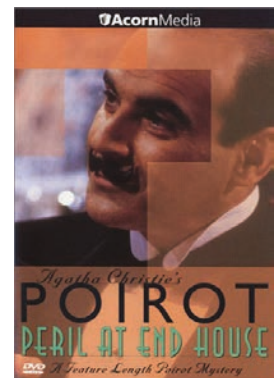
Students will read more if the book is in their favorite format. Some prefer printed books, others ebooks on an ereader or tablet, and many prefer a reading app on their cell phone. A few prefer an audio book, especially if English is not their first language, so they can listen as they read along. I also let students read in other languages first (such as Cantonese), before they read again in English. I let students choose for themselves, although I have print books in English available in class.

When there is French in the text, I ask students studying French to help us translate. If there are none, we use a translator app online. I also have a French-English dictionary in class. Keep a list of the common phrases on the board for reference. We also look up any new vocabulary, which varies according to the class and individual students.

Concurrent with the reading of the novel, I show the class the Acorn Media film *Agatha Christie's Poirot: Peril at End House* starring David Suchet. American teens struggle with the setting at first; southern England in the 1930s is not familiar to them. They can't visualize Poirot's world between the wars; the film literally sets the scene for them, shows them the characters, clothes, and cars, and excites them about reading "ahead" to find out what happens next. Using the film judiciously helps get the students reading. It is always key to test their knowledge on what is the same or different between the book and film. I often use a Venn diagram or a chart itemizing what is same, missing, added, or changed from the book.

I assign a few chapters at a time, and I vary the length of the reading assignment based on the students. We also read daily during class for 10-20 minutes to whet their appetites for reading. The timing is based on their attentiveness and focus. We discuss the current reading daily and examine any student difficulties. There is a due date for each section assigned; on that date, students produce work in class as evidence of their reading. To engage the students, I have them create their own reading check assignments as individuals in class. I vary the assignments and often give students a choice of two or three; they must be emailed to me promptly during class to receive credit.

Do not spoil the surprise of the exciting climax of the book. Warn students who are reading ahead not to reveal the ending. Teens who are reading devotedly hate spoilers. Be careful until your due date. After that, all's fair in class discussions and activities.



## READING CHECK ASSIGNMENTS

### *One assignment at each reading due date*

- Create a Quiz: Write 5-10 questions and answers based on the reading. (I allow students to use a free online quiz maker and send the link to me. They'll find examples of quizzes for *And Then There Were None* and *Murder on the Orient Express* [here](#).)
- Create a Quiz: Write 5-10 examples of parts that are missing from, added to, or changed in the film. Show what you know about the book. (I allow students to use a free online quiz maker and send the link to me. They'll find examples of quizzes for *And Then There We None* and *Murder on the Orient Express* [here](#).)
- Create a Chart: Keep a running tally of clues and suspects.
- Art Design: Create a set and/or costume design for a stage or film production based on the novel. Possibilities are:
  - The garden at the Majestic Hotel
  - End House interiors
  - End House exterior during fireworks
  - Miss Buckley
- Create a Chart: Keep a running tally of Miss Buckley's accidents.
- Write an Article: Write a short news article about the events of the story so far. Students should answer the journalist's questions in their articles (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?) Suggested topics include:
  - Any of Miss Buckley's accidents
  - The Albatross and Captain Seton
  - The first death
  - The second death
  - The wills of
    - Captain Seton and his uncle
    - Miss Maggie Buckley
    - Miss Nick Buckley

## Post-reading Activities

Students will create and share a variety of activities and projects. Generally, at first we focus on quick projects meant to help students understand the text. Later, the projects get more creative, lengthy, and innovative. Some activities may be done on paper or in a document; others lend themselves to posters or Power Points.

Some activities will be done individually, while others may be done in a small group of 2-5. I will give the parameters below for work done alone. Groups must perform the same amount of work as individuals. For example, one student's 2-page newsletter becomes a 4-page document for 2 students or a 6-page document for 3 students. Occasionally, I require group work to foster teamwork and encourage new skills. Each student knows the goals being sought by the teacher through the assignment.

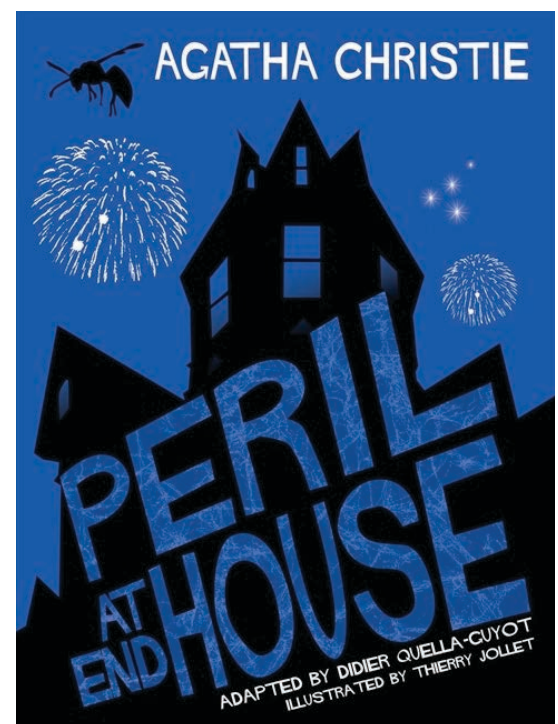
### A. WRITTEN WORK TO FURTHER UNDERSTANDING (INDIVIDUAL WORK, 1 PAGE EACH)

- Evil Plan: Create a flow chart or list to identify the step-by-step process of the villain/antagonist's evil plan in the plot. Alternatively, write a summary of the plan.
- Good Plan: Create a flow chart or list, identifying the step-by-step process of the detective/protagonist's good plan to thwart the villain and save the innocent. Alternatively, write a summary of the plan.

- Create a Clue Chart: Identify all the pertinent clues, what they suggested, and whether they were valid clues or red herrings. Alternatively, create a Power Point presentation analyzing the clues (10+ slides).
- Create a Suspect Chart: Identify all the suspects and which clues pointed to each suspect. Clarify which clues were valid and which were not (red herrings). Alternatively, create a Power Point presentation analyzing the suspects (10+ slides).
- Write alibis for the innocent suspects from their points of view for police.

## B. ACTIVITIES (INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP OF 2-5 STUDENTS)

- Write a confession by the villain, including the motivations for the crimes. Decide which characters will see/read the confession in a framing story. This story should be about 2-3 pages.
- Create a crossword puzzle using an online puzzle maker. Use the information you have already learned to write at least 30 clues. Clues could focus on details of the plot, new vocabulary (especially SAT words), and literary terminology applied to the novel. A group could create a series of related puzzles focusing on the book.
- Identify the major themes of the novel. Write a short essay of 2 pages examining 3-5 themes evident in the novel. Use the essential questions for ideas.
- Write a test for the novel, showing what you know about it. Include an answer key.
- Identify and explain the novel's images, symbols, and irony in an essay.
- Research meals, food, and drink available to characters in the novel. Create a menu for the book, including recipes, in a Power Point or document. (For extra credit, make something for the class to eat, using appropriate substitutions for alcohol and costly items.)
- Analyze the internal and external conflicts faced by the major and key characters at different times in the plot. This should be a short 2-page essay.
- Create advertisements inspired by the novel, focusing on businesses mentioned in the text. These can each be Power Point slides, in a document, or on poster paper. Examples may include the following:
  - The Majestic Hotel
  - St. Loo, Cornwall
  - End House
  - Mr. Vyse's law office
  - The gas station
  - The hospital
  - The flower shop and/or chocolate shop
- Draw (on paper or on the computer) one scene from the novel in the form of anime or manga. There is already a cartoon book version of the novel to see for ideas, as well as a Japanese cartoon for television.
- Design a new cover for a book (front and back), audio book, digital game, manga version of the book, and/or a theatrical poster for a play version.



## C. FINAL PROJECTS (GROUP WORK SUGGESTED, 2-5 PER GROUP)

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*Teachers may need to offer more assistance on some of these projects. Here are the instructions I give to my students.*

- Create a 1-3 minute movie trailer for the novel that uses current actors, novel quotes, images, music, and key scenes. Use a program such as iMovie or MovieMaker. Remember to write credits. Don't give away the ending: no spoilers. Post the movie to YouTube and email the link to me.
- Create a Jeopardy-style trivia game, using an online program such as [www.Jeopardylabs.com](http://www.Jeopardylabs.com) and incorporating what you know about the novel. Play the game during class as student hosts.
- Create social media for the characters.
  - Using your computer or cell phone, create Twitter accounts for the characters. Then have these characters "tweet" to each other in their characters' voices. Move through the plot using tweets.
  - Using a document, create a replica of a Facebook account for each of the characters. Add appropriate photos and information. Then have these characters post to each other in their characters' voices as they move through the plot. Email me the documents.
  - Use Instagram or Pinterest to create appropriate photos and graphics for the characters and/or novel as a whole.
  - Create a 3-5 page document detailing a series of texts between various characters as they move through the plot of the novel.
  - Overall, have characters "friend" or "follow" only the appropriate characters. They may "block" or "mute" or "unfollow" certain characters as well. Email me the links or documents. Replica accounts or texts are also good.
- Write "Fanfiction" for the novel. Choose a character, and write an original short story (3-5 pages) in which you continue the story. Be accurate to the details of the novel and true to the characters. Feel free to be imaginative and creative as long as you don't contradict Mrs. Christie and her book.
- Create a talk show featuring interviews with the characters at the end of the book. Use your imagination without contradicting the author; costumes and props help set the scene. This may be written in a news article or short story, acted out live in class, or filmed on the students' devices/cell phones. A show should be 2-3 minutes per student.
- Create a broadcast news program using computers and/or cell phones to film a news show about the events in the book as if it were real. Include both in-studio and "live" camera shots if possible. Include information gleaned from the earlier research done on the time period and settings. A show should be 2-3 minutes per student. If you do not wish to act, you can create a news website with articles and graphics.
- Act out a scene (live or on video or as a radio play) from the novel using a script or scenario. A set, costumes, props, cue cards, and a student director will help. A show should be 2-3 minutes per student.
- Write an original "deleted scene" such as you might see on a DVD. This story should fit seamlessly into the novel; it will probably be a scene mentioned in the novel.

Examples:

- Captain Seton's engagement
- The end of the Albatross
- Nick's accidents
- The first death
- The second death
- Epilogue for Nick
- Epilogue for Freddie



### ***Final Project Judging***

All students should view all final projects and participate as appropriate.

Stories, puzzles, and essays should be copied or emailed so all students may enjoy them.

Students should take brief notes (3-5 things they liked) about each project; no negativity is allowed. After all projects have been presented, students should review their notes and vote for their top 3 projects. Students should turn in their notes and 3 votes for the teacher to collate.

Announce the winning projects to the class. Providing a certificate, a sticker, or a piece of candy to the winners entertains the students, encourages healthy competition, and builds rapport with the class.

### ***Additional Resources***

You'll find more teaching resources at the official [Agatha Christie website](#) as well as at [HarperAcademic](#).

## **Education Standards**

### **A. ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS**

#### **Holy Cross High School**

##### **Standards, Objectives, and Skills:**

LS 1.0 Students will learn to **speak** for a variety of real purposes and audiences and practice speaking in front of their peers, such as giving directions.

LS 2.0 Students will **listen** attentively and actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources (such as lectures, videos, oral presentations, the internet, CD's, Power Point presentations, recordings, etc.)

LS 3.0 Students will learn to **write** in coherent language that varies in content and form for a variety of audiences and purposes.

LS 4.0 Students will learn to **read** various texts with an emphasis on improving their comprehension, vocabulary, and critical analysis skills.

LS 6.0 Students will learn to **research** from a variety of sources (including digital media) and present their results in a variety of formats. Students will learn to document and acknowledge sources conforming to specific MLA standards.

### **B. NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY STANDARDS**

#### **Summary**

**1. Creativity and Innovation:** Students demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology.

Students:

- a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes.
- b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression.
- c. use models and simulations to explore complex systems and issues.
- d. identify trends and forecast possibilities.

**2. Communication and Collaboration** Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others.

Students:

- a. interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media.
- b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.

- c. develop cultural understanding and global awareness by engaging with learners of other cultures.
- d. contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems.

**3. Research and Information Fluency** Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information.

Students:

- a. plan strategies to guide inquiry.
- b. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media.
- c. evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks.
- d. process data and report results.

**4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making** Students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources.

Students:

- a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation.
- b. plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project.
- c. collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions.
- d. use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions.

**5. Digital Citizenship** Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior.

Students:

- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology.
- b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity.
- c. demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning.
- d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship.

**6. Technology Operations and Concepts** Students demonstrate a sound understanding of technology concepts, systems, and operations.

Students:

- a. understand and use technology systems.
- b. select and use applications effectively and productively.
- c. troubleshoot systems and applications.
- d. transfer current knowledge to learning of new technologies.