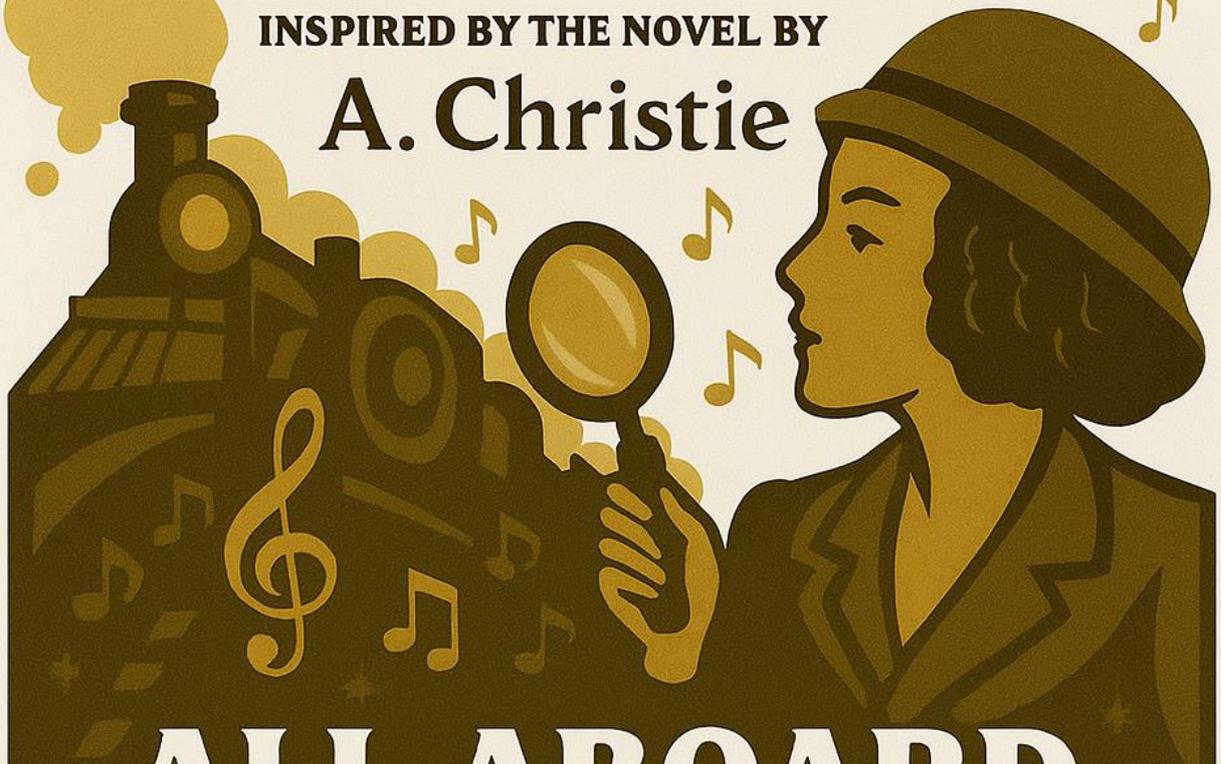# MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS
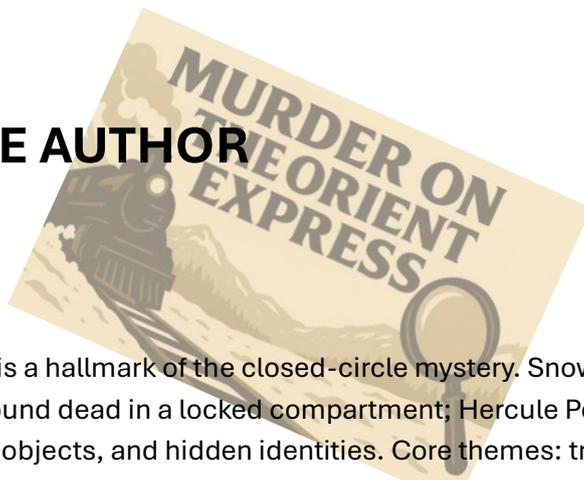
INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL BY

A. Christie

ALL ABOARD
THE ORIENT EXPRESS
TEACHER'S MATERIAL

THE WORK AND THE AUTHOR

The Work (the novel)

Murder on the Orient Express (1934) is a hallmark of the closed-circle mystery. Snow strands the luxury Orient Express; a man is found dead in a locked compartment; Hercule Poirot must dissect conflicting alibis, misleading objects, and hidden identities. Core themes: truth vs. justice; collective responsibility; appearances vs. reality. Classic architecture: crime → evidence & interrogations → double solution (legal vs. moral).

Setting & atmosphere

The confined train intensifies suspicion: strangers share corridors, secrets, and judgments while the outside world is frozen and silent. The international passenger list mirrors clashing codes of class, nation, and ethics.

Famous adaptations (brief)

• Film (1974) — Sidney Lumet; Albert Finney (Poirot); Ingrid Bergman (Oscar).

• Television (2010) — Agatha Christie's Poirot with David Suchet.

• Film (2017) — Kenneth Branagh (dir./star), ensemble cast.

• Stage (2017) — Ken Ludwig's play, widely produced.

The Author (Agatha Christie, 1890–1976)

Dubbed the "Queen of Crime," Christie wrote 80+ novels/collections and several plays (including The Mousetrap, the world's longest-running production). Born in Torquay (Devon), she served as a nurse and dispenser in WWI, sharpening her knowledge of poisons. Creator of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Curiosities: the 11-day disappearance (1926); billions of copies sold; Poirot received an obituary in The New York Times (1975).

ADAPTATION AND CURIOSITIES

Our Stage Adaptation (for students 13–17)

Crafted for learners: accessible English, clear motivations, and visible clues. Physical theatre and underscored transitions keep suspense high while reinforcing vocabulary (alibi, motive, clue, testimony, confession). Students are invited to weigh the two solutions presented at the end.

Key choices (director's notes)

• Narrative clarity — interrogations foreground each piece of evidence; red herrings are signposted by action and rhythm.

• Physical theatre & music — movement and onstage sound cues underline suspense and transitions between compartment, corridor, and dining car.

• Student engagement — brief refrains and repeated lines aid recall; active listening and deduction are encouraged.

Curiosities (context & legacy)

• Why a train? Glamour plus claustrophobia — the perfect closed circle for a mystery.

• Page to stage/screen — from Lumet (1974) to Branagh (2017) and Ken Ludwig's stage play (2017), adaptations highlight the double ending (law vs. moral solution).

• In the classroom — evidence, testimony and deduction naturally build critical thinking and argumentation.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Hercule Poirot — Belgian detective, razor-sharp observer

World-famous detective aboard the Orient Express. In this staging, Poirot is portrayed by multiple actors who exchange cane and hat, sharing the same intellect and 'voice'. Methods: precise observation, calm interrogations, and a final presentation of two possible solutions.

Mary Debenham — composed British governess

Quiet, intelligent, self-controlled; connection to the Armstrong case emerges through a lullaby and later revelations. Shares a bond with Colonel Arbuthnot; endures a staged 'scratch' injury during the investigation.

Colonel Arbuthnot — soldier's honour, fierce loyalty

British Army officer, proud and protective of Mary. His pipe/pipe-cleaner links him to one of the clues; he patrols the corridor the night of the murder and proves to be a precise marksman when a diversion is required.

Mrs. Hubbard (Linda Arden) — theatrical matron with a secret

Outspoken American who steals scenes with humour and bravado. Ultimately revealed as Linda Arden, celebrated actress and grandmother of Daisy Armstrong. Orchestrates the collective plan and drives the moral argument of the ending.

Hector MacQueen — anxious secretary with a burden

Ratchett's American assistant, talkative and nervous. Son of the judge from the Armstrong trial; helps engineer letters and documents to draw Ratchett onto the train. Incline to panic and fainting when confronted with blood and memory.

Mr. Ratchett (Cassetti) — the victim with a criminal past

Wealthy American posing as an art dealer; in truth, Cassetti, the gangster behind the Armstrong kidnapping. Attempts to hire Poirot and threatens him. Found stabbed in his locked compartment; wounds vary in depth, pointing to multiple hands.

Countess Andrenyi (Helena Goldenberg) — elegance and grief

Hungarian noblewoman with concealed identity; Daisy Armstrong's aunt. Leaves a silk handkerchief marked 'H' and shows steel beneath poise—her prayer and resolve reveal the depth of loss that motivates her actions.

Theatre Terms — Glossary

Italian ↔ English reference for the show

Italiano	English
teatro (la sala)	theatre (the house)
palcoscenico / palco	stage
platea	stalls / orchestra (seating)
galleria / loggione	balcony / gallery
quinta / quinte	wing(s)
retropalco	backstage
sipario	curtain
chiamata in scena	curtain call
scena	scene
atto	act
intervallo	intermission
scenografia	set / scenery
fondale	backdrop
props (attrezzeria)	props (properties)
costume	costume
trucco	make-up
luci	lighting
faro / spot	spotlight
effetti sonori	sound effects
microfono	microphone
copione / testo	script
battuta (di testo)	line
segnale	cue
regia	direction
regista	director
autore / drammaturgo	playwright
direttore di scena	stage manager
compagnia / cast	cast / company
protagonista / ruolo principale	lead role
ruolo di riserva	understudy
ensemble / coro	ensemble
prove	rehearsals
prova generale	dress rehearsal
bloccaggio (spostamenti in scena)	blocking
coreografia	choreography
buca dell'orchestra	orchestra pit
foyer / front of house	foyer / front of house
biglietteria	box office
maschere (personale di sala)	ushers

1) Mystery Vibes (Agree/Disagree)

Objective: activate ethical themes (law vs justice); rapid speaking.

Time: 5–8 minutes

Materials: worksheet with 6 statements + notes space.

Output: two argued sentences in English using because/whereas.

Instructions (students): Read each statement. Tick one option and add a note. Then write two short arguments using because/whereas.

1. The end justifies the means.

☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree

Notes: _____

2. Loyalty to friends is more important than the law.

☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree

Notes: _____

3. Truth and justice are not always the same.

☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree

Notes: _____

4. Everyone can lie under pressure.

☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree

Notes: _____

5. A crime can be forgiven if it restores justice.

☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree

Notes: _____

6. Punishment should match intention rather than result.

☐ Agree ☐ Unsure ☐ Disagree

Notes: _____

Challenge: Turn one of your notes into a 2–3 line mini-speech using whereas/because/therefore.

2) Train Ticket Predictions

Objective: predict plot/setting and activate key vocabulary.

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: this worksheet (mock ticket) + pen.

Output: three predictions using the frame "I think... because...".

Instructions: Read the ticket and icons. Write three predictions about the story. Use "I think... because...".

———————————— ORIENT EXPRESS ————————————

From: ISTANBUL To: CALAIS   Date: __/__/193_   Carriage: __   Seat: __

Passenger name: _____   Class: ____   Compartment: ____

Weather: ❄ Snow | Status: Delayed | Conductor: _____ Time: _____

Icons observed: 🕐 (watch) 📻 (radio) 📇 (handkerchief) 🚬 (pipe cleaner) 📝 (burnt note) 👨 (moustache)

_____

_____

Prediction 1: I think _____ because _____.

Prediction 2: I think _____ because _____.

Prediction 3: I think _____ because _____.

Word bank (optional): snow • compartment • clue • suspect • alibi • motive • conductor • dining car • corridor.

3) Modal Detective (must / might / can't)

MODAL
DETECTIVE
☐ MUST

Objective: practise deduction with modal verbs using mystery clues.

Time: 10–12 minutes

Materials: this worksheet + pen.

Output: three deductions per scenario using must / might / can't.

Language frame: It must be… / He might have… / She can't be… because…

1) The watch stopped at 1:15.

must _____

might _____

can't _____

2) A handkerchief with an 'H' is found in the victim's compartment.

must _____

might _____

can't _____

3) A pipe cleaner is discovered in the dining car.

must _____

might _____

can't _____

4) A burnt note suggests the name 'Miss Daisy Armstrong'.

must _____

might _____

can't _____

5) Fresh snow outside shows no footprints near the window.

must _____

might _____

can't _____

6) The door was locked from the inside; several passengers heard voices in the corridor.

must _____

might _____

can't _____

Challenge: Turn one deduction into a mini-speech (2 lines) using whereas/because/therefore.

4) Close Reading — Extract, Clues & Inference

Objective: understand key details and infer hidden meanings from a short extract.

Time: 12–15 minutes • Materials: this worksheet + pen • Output: complete answers + two modal deductions.

Insert the extract here (80–160 words):

_____

_____

_____

A) Comprehension (answer in complete sentences)

1. Who is speaking to whom? Where are they?

_____

2. What is the main emotion? Quote two words that show it.

_____

3. What concrete evidence appears in the extract?

_____

4. What information is implied but not said directly? Explain in one sentence.

_____

B) Vocabulary in context

Match each word to a synonym, then write one original sentence for two of them.

1) alibi 2) motive 3) testimony 4) clue 5) red herring

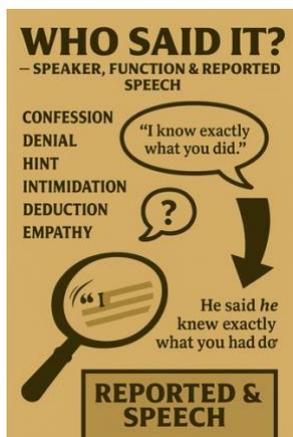Synonyms: reason • misleading sign • statement • evidence • excuse for whereabouts

Your sentences:

_____

_____

C) Modal deduction (must / might / can't)

Write two deductions based on this extract:

1) It _____ be _____

because _____.

2) It _____ be _____

because _____.

5) Who Said It? — Speaker, Function & Reported Speech

Objective: identify speakers and communicative function; practise reported speech.

Time: 12–15 minutes • Materials: this worksheet + pen • Output: completed table + one reported-speech paragraph.

Insert 4–6 short quotes from the script (up to one line each):

QUOTE | SPEAKER | FUNCTION
(confession/denial/hint/intimidation/deduction/empathy)

--- | ------ | -- 1)

_____| _____ |

_____ 2)

_____| _____ |

_____ 3)

_____| _____ |

_____ 4)

_____| _____ |

_____ 5)

_____| _____ |

_____ 6)

_____| _____ |

_____

Reported speech practice

Choose two quotes and rewrite them in reported speech. Use a reporting verb (say/tell/claim/deny/warn/admit).

A)

_____

_____

B)

_____

_____

THANK YOU — SEE YOU AT THE THEATRE!

You've just completed the Murder on the Orient Express learning pack. Great job!

Thanks for playing, reading, and thinking with us. These pages help you track clues, weigh choices, and enjoy the show even more. Bring your ideas, your questions, and your curiosity — theatre is alive because of its audience (that's you!).

Curiosities about our show

• Two solutions: Poirot presents a legal explanation and a moral one. Notice how the staging guides you to compare them.

• Clues onstage: the handkerchief "H", pipe cleaner, burnt note, and pocket watch appear early — watch when they are planted, found, and re-framed.

• Accents & slips: listen for tiny accent changes and wording mistakes during interrogations; they're not random.

• Train-in-motion: lights, sound, and moving set pieces create corridors, compartments, and a dining car within seconds — spot the sound bridges.

• Ensemble magic: several actors switch roles with a hat/scarf/stance change. Track how posture and voice reset identity.

• Snow & silence: the soundscape (wind, wheels, whistle) is part of the story — notice when it suddenly stops.

• Justice vs law: by the final tableau, ask yourself which "truth" feels fair — and why.

After the show — 3 quick reflections

– Which clue changed your mind about what happened? Why?

_____

_____

– Law or justice? Which ending would you choose, and what evidence supports your choice?

_____

_____

– Which moment will you remember next week (a line, a sound, a gesture, or a light cue)?

_____

_____

AT THE THEATRE
GOOD PRACTICES

🚫🍟	**DO NOT EAT**
🚻	**GO TO THE TOILET BEFORE THE SHOW**
🎭	**RESPECT THE ACTORS** Actors are not on TV. They are on stage, live, with real emotions.
📵	**SET YOUR PHONE TO SILENT MODE**
❓👕	**PREPARE YOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE AFTER-SHOW** The person who asks the most interesting question will win a tour T-shirt.

Name: _____

First name: _____

INFO: WWW.ERASMUSTHEATRE.COM

See you at the theatre