



Murder on the Orient Express

Enrichment Guide

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Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre is proud to call Manitoba home. Royal MTC is located in Winnipeg on Treaty 1, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Inninewak, Anishinewak, Dakota Oyate, and Denesuline, and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We are thankful for the benefits sharing this land has afforded us, acknowledge the responsibilities of the Treaties, and embrace the opportunity to partner with Indigenous communities in spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

The Role of the Audience

Theatre needs its audience! We are happy to have you here. Every staff person, actor, and crew member backstage plays an important part in your experience, and you also have a role in the experience of cast, crew and the people around you.

Arrive Early: Please make sure you give yourself enough time to find your seat before the performance starts. Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. We ask groups to arrive at least 20-30 minutes before the show.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **turn off** your cell phone/mp3 player/gaming system/camera/smart watch. Texting, surfing, and gaming during performances is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. Using cameras and recording devices during a performance is **never** allowed.

Talking During the Performance: Even when you whisper, you can be heard by performers and people around you. Unless it is a relaxed performance, disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait until after the performance to share your words with others.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. When there is an intermission, snacks and drinks may be available for purchase. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal MTC, but we respectfully ask you not to wear hats in the theatre or block the view of those behind you. Please do not wear strong scents like perfume or body spray. We thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If you leave the theatre, you will be readmitted at the discretion of Front of House staff. If readmitted, you may be placed in an empty seat at the back of the auditorium instead of your original seat.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave if that person is being inappropriate or disruptive including (but not limited to): talking, using devices that produce light or sound, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: A short question and answer period with the actors takes place after student matinees, first Tuesday evening shows, and some public matinees. While watching the show, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors about the production or life in the theatre. Our artists deserve to be treated with respect! It's okay to have a negative opinion, but this is your chance to ask questions and understand the performance or process, not to criticize. If you have a concern, see the house manager after the show and they will make sure your feedback gets to the appropriate Royal MTC staff.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, cry, gasp – responding to the performance is part of the nature of theatre! As you get involved in the story, try to balance your reactions with respecting the people around you. The curtain call is part of the performance too – it gives you a chance to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause, and for them to thank you for your attention. We all appreciate when you stay at your seat and join in the applause!

About the Creators

Agatha Christie (1890-1976) is the best-selling novelist of all time, with the world's longest-running play (*The Mousetrap*). With over one billion books sold in English and another billion in over 100 languages, she is outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare. She wrote 80 crime novels and collections of short stories, over 25 plays, and six novels under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. She was so prolific a writer that she had to form a corporation to address the tax implications.

Christie grew up as the youngest child in a comfortable family in England. She was homeschooled and attended girls' schools in Paris. She married Archibald Christie in 1914. In WWI, she became a nurse and worked in a dispensary, where she learned about medicines and poisons – helpful for a mystery writer! At the end of the war, she wrote the first tale of Hercule Poirot, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. She had one daughter with her first husband; she divorced him in 1928, after which she travelled on the famous Orient Express. In 1930 she remarried an archaeologist, Max Mallowan, and travelled with him, writing and helping with archaeological digs with her husband, as seen in the far-east settings of her novels. Christie spent WWII volunteering as a pharmacist and helping with her grandson. Christie led an extraordinary life at a time when women's rights were restrictive.

Related Resource Links: Find [a timeline of Christie's life](#) and [read more about her stories and how she wrote](#) at her website. The [podcast All About Agatha](#) analysed all 66 of Christie's mystery novels and conducts interviews with fans of her work.

Ken Ludwig is an internationally acclaimed playwright who had six shows on Broadway and eight in the West End. He has won the Edwin Forrest Award, two Laurence Olivier Awards, two Helen Hayes Awards, the Charles MacArthur Award and the Edgar Award for Best Mystery of the Year. His plays include commissions from the Agatha Christie Estate, the Royal Shakespeare Co., The Old Globe Theatre and the Bristol Old Vic. His first play on Broadway, *Lend Me A Tenor*, won three Tony Awards and was nominated for nine. His best-known Broadway and West End shows include *Crazy for You* (five years on Broadway, Tony and Olivier Award Winner for Best Musical), *Moon Over Buffalo*, *Leading Ladies*, *Twentieth Century*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Game's Afoot*, *The Fox on the Fairway*, *Midsummer/Jersey*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Treasure Island* and *The Beaux' Stratagem*. His plays starred Alec Baldwin, Carol Burnett, Lynn Redgrave, Mickey Rooney, Hal Holbrook, Dixie Carter, Tony Shalhoub, Anne Heche, Joan Collins and Kristin Bell. He is a McCarter Theatre/Sallie B. Goodman Fellow, and he has degrees from Harvard, Haverford College and Cambridge University.

Related Resource Links: Read an [interview with Ludwig about this play and his writing in general](#); watch a [video of Ludwig from the UK tour](#) (1:30); find out more on [Ken Ludwig's website](#).

Characters and Setting

There are fewer characters in the play than in the novel because of the logistics of having everyone on stage. These are the characters as we meet them at the beginning of the play:

Mr. Ratchett - an obnoxious American businessman

Mr. MacQueen - secretary to Mr. Ratchett

Princess Dragomiroff - a displaced Russian aristocrat

Colonel Arbuthnot - a retired Scottish army Colonel

Mary Debenham - a governess travelling to a new post

Greta Ohlsson - Princess Dragomiroff's companion

Michel the conductor - a French man

Mrs. Hubbard - a very animated wealthy American woman who has been widowed twice and is currently married

Countess Elena Andrenyi - a doctor of common descent who married royalty.

Mr. Bouc is the director of the Wagon-Lit Train Company, which owns the Orient Express.

Hercule Poirot - a Belgian national, who is the world's greatest detective.

Pay close attention to our characters, all is not what it seems!

Setting: Istanbul; but mostly aboard a luxury train as it travels from Istanbul to Western Europe. The year is 1934. Act 1 occurs mid-day to morning; Act 2 occurs morning to mid-day.

Content Overview

This section may contain spoilers.

Occasional strong language. Reference to and depictions of murder, reference to suicide, alcohol use. Occasional ethnic stereotypes of the period, e.g. someone is “exotic” or “hot-blooded.” Probable use of theatrical blood, loud noises, flashing lights, haze. Details at <https://royalmtc.ca/Your-Visit/Content-Guide.aspx>

Plot Summary

Detective Hercule Poirot is aboard the Orient Express when an unlikeable wealthy American is murdered. As the debonair detective investigates, he encounters a cast of intriguing passengers. With his unparalleled eye for detail and keen instincts, Poirot uncovers secrets and motives as he seeks the truth behind the murder in this suspenseful tale of deception, revenge and justice.

Synopsis

This section contains spoilers.

Scene One: We hear a train hurtling towards us, its bright lights flashing. Then, parents and a Nanny lovingly put a little girl to bed. Daisy Armstrong, the little girl, is abducted after her Nanny leaves the room. At this point, we meet Hercule Poirot, world-famous detective. He prepares the audience for the symbolism of the train and the complicated nature of the mystery they are about to watch.

Scene Two: We begin in Istanbul, at the luxury Tokatlian Hotel, with Mr. Poirot at breakfast. Mr. Poirot overhears Colonel Arbuthnot, and Mary Debenham, an Englishwoman. They are clearly close acquaintances and speak in mysterious terms of getting over some unpleasant business and putting it behind them. Mrs. Hubbard, a crass American woman, is also at breakfast. Hector MacQueen, also an American, speaks with her. Mr. Bouc, operator of Wagon-Lit, the company that owns the Orient Express, enters the restaurant. He is a friend of Mr. Poirot. Poirot and Bouc will be travelling together on the train that evening. Poirot receives a message that there are no tickets left for the train. Bouc, remarks that it is never sold out at this time of year and arranges a bunk for Poirot. Bouc regales Poirot with the opulence of the train.

Scene Three: The setting has shifted to the Orient Express platform. We meet Michel, a Frenchman and the conductor. Princess Dragomiroff, an elderly Russian woman, enters the platform with her maid. Greta Ohlsson, the maid, is Swedish, a missionary, in her thirties, and seems timid. Samuel Ratchett, the boorish middle-aged American businessman, enters at this point. His secretary, Hector MacQueen, goes with him. Countess Andrenyi, a Hungarian doctor whose beauty is renowned, joins the cast boarding the train. Mrs. Hubbard, an outspoken American woman, rounds out the cast.

Scene Four: The setting is the dining car. Mr. Ratchett tries to hire Mr. Poirot to investigate who is sending him threatening letters and to guard him on the train. Mr. Poirot emphatically declines. Ratchett then makes an indecent proposal to the Countess, who rejects him. Foreshadowing shows the snow falling and Mr. McQueen leaving Mr. Ratchett a glass of wine before bed.

Scene Five: The setting is the sleeping compartments. We see several passengers getting ready for bed. Mr. Ratchett and Mrs. Hubbard share a connecting door. Mr. Ratchett makes it known that he has a pistol on his person.

Scene Six: The scene opens with the conductor radioing ahead to have snow-clearing equipment prepared as they head into the mountains.

Scene Seven: Colonel Arbuthnot and Mary have an intimate conversation about her concerns over what they must do. McQueen interrupts them as the train hits a snow drift and stops.

Scene Eight: Mrs. Hubbard alarms the passengers, screaming that a man was in her room.

Scene Nine: The setting changes to breakfast in the dining car. Mr. Ratchett is discovered in his bed, stabbed to death. His window was open. All the passengers react. Mr. Poirot begins questioning people. Bouc begs Poirot to solve the case. He accepts. The Countess, who is a doctor, assists Poirot with the body. There are eight stab wounds, some deep, some mere scratches from numerous angles, delivered by right and left-hand blows. At this point, it

becomes clear that someone spiked Mr. Ratchett's wine with a sedative. Several clues come to light: a pocket watch with the face broken at 1:15, a pipe cleaner, a handkerchief with the initial H, matches, and a partially burned note. Poirot finds that the note reads, "Remember little Daisy Armstrong." Daisy Armstrong was a five-year-old murder victim four years ago. The guilty party got away. Poirot deduces that Ratchett is an alias for Bruno Cassetti, the accused murderer of Daisy Armstrong. Poirot agrees to investigate the case.

Scene Ten: Poirot is interviewing passengers in the dining car.

Princess Dragomiroff is a displaced Russian citizen. Her alibi for the time of the crime is the Countess Andrenyi. They were reading in the Princess's berth.

Greta Ohlsson, a Swedish citizen, is the Princess's maid. Her alibi is Miss Debenham, the English governess. They share a compartment. The Princess reveals the backstory of all those affected by the murder. Her best friend was Daisy Armstrong's grandmother, the actress Linda Arden. After the murder, Daisy's mother died in childbirth with her unborn child. Colonel Armstrong, Daisy's father, committed suicide. The French housemaid also committed suicide. Hector McQueen, the American secretary for the deceased Ratchett, is the son of the DA for New York who tried Cassetti. His father was shattered by implicating the innocent French maid. He lists all the members of the Armstrong household at the time of the murder:

- Mrs. Armstrong's sister, Helena
- Mrs. Armstrong's mother
- a governess
- a baby nurse
- Suzanne, a French housemaid

McQueen and Colonel Arbuthnot are each other's alibi on the observation deck from 12:00 to 2:00. McQueen mentions seeing a small, feminine conductor, not Michel, at this time.

Mrs. Hubbard arrives with a button from a conductor's uniform that she found in her room.

Colonel Arbuthnot enters, frantically searching for Mary. We hear a gunshot, and the cast finds her in a pool of blood in Ratchett's room.

Act 2

Scene One: The Countess treats Mary. She reports being shot by a small man in a uniform. She had been in Mrs. Hubbard's room looking for aspirin when she saw a bloody knife.

Scene Two: Michel radios the next station for aid as the train remains stuck in the snow, and a murderer is aboard.

Scene Three: Poirot questions Mary regarding the relationship with the Colonel and the intimate conversation he overheard before they boarded the train. She insists she just met him and has never been to the States. Poirot notices that Mary's wound occurred from very close range. Michel searched the train; there was no one on board other than passengers and crew. The mysterious second conductor remains unaccounted for. Poirot finds the conductor's missing uniform and a passkey in Ms. Ohlsson's suitcase. Poirot questions the Countess about

the grease spot on her passport. He suspects her name is Helena, not Elena, and the spot obscures the "H." The Countess admits that her identity is Daisy Armstrong's aunt.

Scene Four: Bouc radios the next station requesting help quickly. They are stuck in the snow with a murderer and a corpse on board.

Scene Five: The following suspects are in the dining car waiting for Poirot:

- Arbuthnot
- MacQueen
- Greta
- Princess
- Mrs. Hubbard

Poirot questions MacQueen, who admits to seeing Mary but lies about Colonel Armstrong. MacQueen loses his temper and tries to throttle Poirot.

Poirot has two possible solutions:

Firstly, an enemy of Cassetti's boarded the train at Sofia, changed into a conductor's uniform, entered his berth with a passkey, stabbed him eight times and left through Mrs. Hubbard's compartment. This solution is problematic as, due to the storm, the killer would be unable to exit the train.

Secondly, Poirot gives the cast his list of clues through a series of flashbacks:

- It is rare for the Orient Express to be booked full at this time of year.
- It is an eclectic group of travelers.
- The Murder happens behind a locked door.
- Right and left-handed blows made eight stab wounds of varying strength.
- The enormity of the clues, the only one of value being the damaged watch placed in his pajama pocket at a time when everyone had an alibi.
- Mary's gunshot was self-inflicted to draw attention away from the other clues.

Poirot then identifies the passengers and their relationships with the Armstrong family:

- MacQueen - his father was the prosecutor for the kidnapping and murder case. The effect of the suicide of the innocent maid and Cassetti's evasion of justice was the end of his health.
- Princess Dragomiroff - the best friend of Daisy Armstrong's grandmother.
- Arbuthnot - served with Daisy's father.
- Mary - governess for Daisy.
- Greta - Daisy's nurse.
- Michel the conductor- the father of the maid Suzanne, who committed suicide when wrongly accused.
- Mrs. Hubbard - grandmother of Daisy, and the acclaimed actress Linda Arden. She agrees she is the director of the crime.

Poirot declares his turmoil as he must report to the Yugoslavian police at the next stop. Society must follow the law, and murder is a punishable offence. Mrs Hubbard challenges Poirot to define justice. Cassetti was, without question, evil. The subsequent trials of all the accused in the murder would ruin more lives. Mr. Bouc, the director of the Wagon Lit Company, encourages Poirot to report that an intruder killed Cassetti as the most excellent form of justice.

The play concludes with Poirot telling us the following fate of the passengers:

- Greta does missionary work in Africa.
- Colonel Debenham and Mary were wed in England.
- MacQueen returned to business.
- Michel returned to the train industry.
- The Princess passed away.
- Linda Arden returned to the stage.

Poirot leaves us with the question on his conscience: Did justice prevail?

There are many adaptations of this story, [all listed with their main differences on ScreenRant](#) and some [more information on Christie's website](#). You can watch four different films, plus one in Japanese; listen to the full cast audio drama or another audiobook; or read the book itself in its original or graphic novel form. You can find this media on streaming services, check most versions out from the Winnipeg Public Library, or purchase from a local bookstore like our friends McNally Robinson.

Context and Related Resources

Time Period and the Orient Express

This play is set in 1934: the Interwar period, between the First and Second World Wars. The 1920s, called the Roaring Twenties, a time of boldness, freedom and excess, had just ended. A popular design style was Art Deco, which featured geometric, angular forms, streamlined designs and sleek lines that emphasized speed (new technology was making high speeds possible on many fronts), sharp colour contrasts, and metallic highlights. You can see these influences in both the set and costume designs of MTC's production.

Numerous world powers were vying for expansion as times led to the Second World War. There is a sense of countries and cultures coming together in this play, but you can also notice distrust of certain backgrounds, possibly influenced by these world events. Many of the countries on the train's route would have been, or were about to be, destabilized by war. In 1930, the stock market crashed, triggering a worldwide financial crisis. The world was full of the need to economize. The Orient Express would have been opulent in comparison to most forms of travel.

The Orient Express was a long-distance passenger luxury train service created in 1883 by the Belgian company Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits (CIWL) that operated until 2009. The train travelled the length of Europe, with terminal stations in Paris in the northwest and Istanbul in the southeast, and branches extending service to Athens, Brussels, and London, thus connecting the western and eastern extremities of Europe. Although the original Orient Express was simply a normal international railway service, the name became synonymous with intrigue and luxury rail travel.



Set designer Brian Perchaluk took inspiration from travel posters of the 1930s as well as photographs of the restored Orient Express itself.

Inspiration from Real Events

In 1932, there was a famous yet tragic kidnapping of 20-month-old Charles Lindbergh Jr. Some of the details from this actual case mirror those of the fictitious Armstrong case. “Newspapers literally stopped the presses to break the news” says the Smithsonian. The Lindbergh case prompted the institution of abduction as a federal crime and came under the authority of the FBI. It was one of the early cases to rely on forensic science. This case would have been front-of-mind for readers in 1934 when Christie’s novel was published. Indeed, she correctly predicted that the kidnapper was not an American. Add this to everything else going on in 1932: the Great Depression; rise of totalitarian regimes, fascism, and Nazism despite a huge and destructive world war; and now the kidnapping of a hero’s baby: people were likely wondering, what was the world coming to? In a less cerebral comparison, Christie also knew what it was like to be snowed in on a train, as she experienced in 1929.

Who is Hercule Poirot?

Adapted from agathachristie.com

Hercule Poirot is a fictional Belgian refugee and ex-police officer. Ms. Christie was in contact with Belgian refugees at the end of WWI, possibly drawing inspiration from them. Since his inception over 100 years ago, Poirot’s celebrated cases have been recorded across 33 original novels and over 50 short stories. Standing at 5' 4" – although there have been various interpretations of this on stage and screen– Poirot’s described in writing as having an egg-shaped head, often tilted to one side, and eyes that shine green when he’s excited. He dresses very precisely and takes the utmost pride in his appearance. Poirot likes things to be orderly and neat, once even expressing that he wished eggs were shaped like cubes so that they would be more consistent. Costume designer Joseph Abetria (whose drawing is seen to the right) has hinted at Poirot’s love of clean lines and geometry with his windowpane wool suit in our production. Perhaps even more famous than the man himself, is his moustache. Luxurious, magnificent, immense, and dedicatedly groomed, the moustache precedes Poirot into a room; it’s provocative, and it has a character all its own.

Poirot’s friend Hastings puts us straight in the picture in their first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, where we’re informed that “as a detective, Poirot’s flair had been extraordinary”. While some detectives scabble around on the floor searching for clues, Poirot uses psychology and his extensive knowledge of human nature to weed out the criminals. He will of course take physical evidence into account, but more often than not his combination of order, method and his little grey cells does the trick. Poirot’s cases are invariably finished with typical, dramatic denouement, satisfying his own ego and confirming to all that he is truly “the greatest mind in Europe.”



Mysteries and Whodunits

The British Psychological Society has created a thorough explanation of why people love mysteries. The combination of these factors intrigues our brains:

- Problem-solving assures our survival.
- Mysteries are a safe way for us to experience dark situations.
- It's easier to explore the world of a mystery when we are reasonably sure there will be a moral resolution.
- The characters are often engaging and a little farcical.
- Our brains are rewarded by the activity of gathering clues, revising our ideas, sharing with others and coming to a solution.

Related Resource Links: Read [the full paper about why we love mysteries](#) from the British Psychological Society; playwright/adaptor Ken Ludwig has also explored [Why do Mysteries Grab Us? in an essay](#).

Glossary and Mentions

Concierge – a usually multilingual hotel staff member who handles luggage and mail, makes reservations, and arranges tours.

Enormity – the quality or stage of being immoderate, monstrous, or outrageous.

Exotic – strikingly exciting, or mysteriously different and unusual.

Odyssey – a long wandering or voyage, marked by changes in fortune.

Primal – first in importance.

Succumb – to yield either to superior strength or force, or to overpowering appeal or desire e.g. succumb to temptation; to be brought to an end (such as death) by the effect of destructive or disruptive forces.

The Three Stooges – American vaudeville and comedy troupe active (with various members) between 1920-1970.

Writhing – to twist into coils or folds; to distort; to twist the body or a bodily part in pain.

Explore More: Recommended Library Reading List

Explore More Trains

The Railway Detective by Edward Marston

Explore 1850s London in book one of this historical mystery series featuring Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck. An audacious robbery of a mail train sets Colbeck on an action-packed adventure of murder, blackmail, and destruction.

FICTION MYST MARSTON

Dread Journey by Dorothy B. Hughes

A movie star begins to fear for her life during a train voyage between LA and Chicago when she begins to suspect that her producer is considering extreme measures to get her out of her contract and move on with a younger actress.

FICTION MYST HUGHES

Rail Journeys: From The Orient Express to the Japanese Bullet Train by David Ross

Learn about some of the most remarkable and specular passenger rail journeys in the world in this photographic guide.

385.0222 ROSS 2022

Explore More Twisty Whodunnits

Everyone in my Family has Killed Someone by Benjamin Stevenson

Get to know Earnie Cunningham, mystery fiction aficionado, as he narrates his family reunion celebrating the release of his brother from prison. When a body is found in the snow, Earnie suspects a Cunningham is behind it and tells us the story of his investigation in this self-aware mystery.

FICTION MYST STEVENSON

Magpie Murders by Anthony Horowitz

Follow Susan Ryeland, editor, as she uncovers the connections between the death of Alan Conway, an unlikeable author of beloved crime books, and the manuscript of his latest book. Alan died before sharing the last chapter with Susan, and figuring out the whodunnit of the manuscript might just reveal who killed Alan as well.

FICTION MYST HOROWITZ

Seven and a Half Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle by Stuart Turton

Groundhog Day meets Quantum Leap meets Agatha Christie in this mind-bending mystery. Each day Aiden Bishop wakes in the body of a different guest at Blackheath Manor, and each night Evelyn Hardcastle is murdered. With each loop Aiden learns more about the mystery of his own strange situation and the death of Evelyn Hardcastle.

FICTION MYST TURTON

Explore More Agatha Christie

Death on the Nile by Agatha Christie

Join Poirot on another exciting case, this time on an idyllic cruise down the Nile River. Despite the charming setting, Poirot feels that something is dangerously amiss.

FICTION MYST CHRISTIE



There are 1.4 million books, movies, audiobooks, eBooks and more at the Winnipeg Public Library, and all you need to borrow them is your library card. There are 20 locations throughout the city and there's an online catalogue for requesting items for pick-up at your library of convenience. An e-Library has thousands of eBooks, eAudiobooks and more! All free with your card.

Visit us at Winnipeg.ca/library

Discussion and Writing Prompts

Pre-Show

- What do you think might be the value in presenting something as theatre rather than film? What can happen in live theatre that can't elsewhere?
- What do you think is the difference between revenge and justice?
- Why do you think people enjoy mysteries?
 - For example, is it a desire to have a hero? Does revealing a cause give us understanding and peace of mind?
 - In real life, murder is horrific. But in media, it is very popular. Why this fascination?
 - Ken Ludwig, the adapter/playwright for this show, has written an [essay titled "Why do Mysteries Grab Us?"](#) The educator can read this and use points to inspire dialogue, or perhaps you would want all students to read it and discuss.
- Have you experienced this story in another format (novel, film)? If so, what do you think the greatest challenges might be in bringing it to the stage?
- How do you explain the difference between facts and evidence? Are all facts evidence? Is all evidence a fact?
- Consider the idea of a "perfect crime." What does this mean? What factors would need to be considered to plan one? Is committing this crime ever justified?

Post-Show

- How was a sense of mystery or suspense created onstage?
- How were lighting and sound used in the production? Do you think they were effective?
- What do you think of the two solutions Poirot proposed? Do you think the right decision was made?
- Some characters refer to characteristics of people due to their nationality (etc.) What do you think of this and why might the playwright have kept these phrases from the book?
 - Is it a product of the time when the book was written the playwright wanted to honour?
 - Is it to help us remember when the book was set?
 - Does it make us examine prejudice and profiling in an investigation?
 - Is it effective to use this language in this modern production of an old story?
 - Does this language appear racist or bigoted to us today?
- Does the setting of a train signify anything to you? If you were modernizing this story to set it today, would you still choose a train?

From SparkNotes:

- What set of morals are endorsed by the story?
- What is the significance of law and the jury system in the play?
- How does *Murder on the Orient Express* differ from other murder mysteries? What format rules does it break? Why is it unique?
- Characterize the detective figure as suggested by *Murder on The Orient Express*. Is Poirot's character morally superior to the other characters?

Suggested Classroom Activities

Before the show: The historical period is critical to the play as a vehicle. Some racial stereotypes of the times are evident throughout the play. The following research projects will set an understanding:

1. Prepare a fictional interview starring Agatha Christie, a female author in a time when women didn't have the rights they have now.
2. Create a visual map of the route of the Orient Express. Include visuals of the train itself.
3. Prepare a written argument for the importance of the Lindbergh kidnapping to any one or all of the following elements:
 - capital punishment
 - The addition of kidnapping as a federal crime was investigated by the FBI
 - The emergence of the field of forensic science to solve crimes.

After the Show

1. Use note cards to create character sketches, paying attention to:
 - Physical appearance
 - Internal thoughts
 - Suspicious behaviour or contradicting evidence
 - Final evidence of the character's personality and part in the play
2. Create a "Murder Wall" that explains the outcome of the case. Focus on the clues, the relationships, and the facts. Display as per space permits in the classroom.
3. Contrast and compare the concepts of justice and fairness. The format could be:
 - a mock trial, with Poirot justifying his decision
 - a soliloquy by any of the characters associated with the Armstrong case
 - a debate with the students working in teams to prepare defenses of the murder of Ratchett as an act of justice vs of private vengeance. Remind students to look for merits in their assigned perspective whether or not they personally agree with it; use examples/facts from current events.
4. Though the passengers confess in the end, each lies to Poirot during the show, and Poirot and Bouc ultimately withhold the truth about what happened. Is there ever a good reason to lie? Have students write a persuasive essay with examples defending their answer.
5. Much of the information given in the play we hear about through testimony but never see onstage. Actors sometimes use improvisation – unscripted exploration – to determine and embellish the circumstances for two characters to interact. Create "deleted scenes" from the play with these characters, either in the past or on the train. Justify the relationship between the two characters and what led them to their present circumstances.

Curriculum Connections

Attending Royal MTC's production of *Murder on the Orient Express* and discussing it or participating in some of the suggested or similar activities, will fit into Manitoba curricula in the following subjects:

Drama

- DR-R1 The learner generates initial reactions to drama/theatre experiences.
- DR-R2 The learner critically observes and describes drama/theatre experiences.
- DR-R3 The learner analyzes and interprets drama/ theatre experiences.
- DR-R4 The learner constructs meaning and applies new understandings from dramatic arts experiences.

Connecting (DR-C): The learner develops an understanding of the significance of the dramatic arts by making connections to various contexts of time, place, social groups, and culture.

English Language Arts

Critical thinking in English language arts involves the intentional process of synthesizing and analyzing ideas using criteria and evidence, making reasoned judgments, and reflecting on the outcomes and implications of those judgments.

Citizenship in English language arts involves engaging and working towards a more equitable, a compassionate and sustainable world through the development and value of relationships to self, others, and the natural world. When citizenship as a competency is applied.

Communication in English language arts involves interacting with others and allowing for a message to be received, expressed and understood in multiple ways and for a variety of purposes.

Visual Arts

Responding: The learner uses critical reflection to inform visual arts learning and to develop agency and identity.

- Initial Reaction Observation and Description Analysis and Interpretation
- Identity, Action, and Agency Creation Idea Generation Integration and Development Revision, Refinement, and Sharing
- The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating visual art.
- People and Practices Influence and Impact Roles, Purposes, and Meanings
- The learner develops an understanding of the significance of the visual arts by connecting them to various times, places, social groups, and cultures.

Connecting: Making the learner develop language and practices for making visual art.

- Art Elements and Principles Art Media, Tools, Techniques, and Processes
- Observation and Depiction

Social Studies

2.1.2 The Global Natural Environment: 7-KL-016, 7-KL-017, 7-VL-008

Locate the continents, major landforms, and significant bodies of water on a world map.

Sources

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