



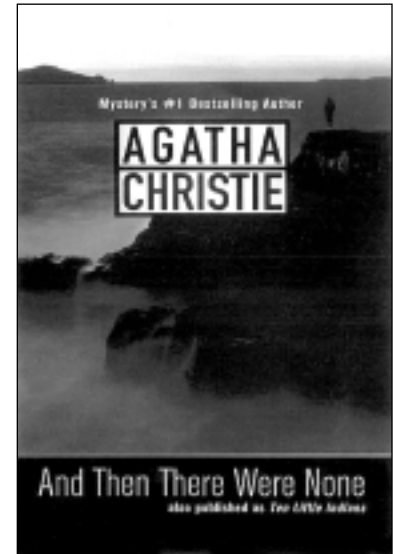
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TEACHER'S GUIDE

# And Then There Were None

by Agatha Christie

*"One of the most ingenious thrillers in many a day."*  
—Time



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VOYA,  
Accelerated Reader,  
Scholastic Reading  
Counts!

## TO THE TEACHER

Among the most famous and widely praised mystery novels ever written, *And Then There Were None* is as suspenseful today as it was when it first appeared sixty years ago. Agatha Christie produced scores of books during of her long career, and this brisk, unique, and intriguing novel is considered one of her masterpieces. Since its initial publication, it has been adapted at least six times for stage and screen—including a 1944 Broadway play with a script by Christie, as well as several later treatments for television and film, one as recent as 1989. *And Then There Were None*, in other words, is a story that continues to perplex, frighten, and captivate each new generation, a classic tale of suspense and suspicion that appeals even to those who do not usually read mysteries.

This novel concerns a group of ten strangers who have all been invited by a Mr. U. N. Owen to spend a brief vacation at a small, somewhat secluded island off the coast of Devon, England. At Indian Island, as their destination is called, the ten individuals are meant to enjoy room and board in Mr. Owen's luxurious home, eight of them staying as his guests and the other two as his servants. But matters quickly and permanently worsen when these ten guests reach the island, gather at the Owen mansion, meet one another, and then realize that not one of them has ever seen or communicated with Mr. Owen in person. Who is their mysterious host, and why has he assembled all of them on Indian Island?

Although his identity remains a riddle—the name “U. N. Owen” is merely a code for “Unknown,” as the characters eventually discover—the host’s reasons for assembling these ten people are made fearfully clear in chapter 3. At this point, a message is played on the mansion’s phonograph (per Mr. Owen’s earlier, written instructions) in which an eerie, anonymous “high clear voice” methodically, individually, and specifically accuses every one of the newly arrived Indian Island visitors of murder. And then, for the remainder of the narrative, the ten stranded guests are killed by an unknown assassin, one by one. . . .

**PRAISE FOR  
AND THEN THERE WERE NONE**

“The whole thing is utterly impossible and utterly fascinating. It is the most baffling mystery that Agatha Christie has ever written, and if any other writer has ever surpassed it for sheer puzzlement the name escapes our memory.”

— *The New York Times*

“[This book is] the most colossal achievement of a colossal career. . . . Must rank with Christie’s best [at] the top notch of detection.”

— *The New Statesman and Nation*

“Smart as anything . . . you’ll have to hand it to Miss Christie.”

— *The New Yorker*

“Christie’s masterpiece.”

— *The Spectator*

**PREPARING TO READ**

This Teacher’s Guide is primarily divided into two sections, both of which appear immediately below. The first, “Following and Understanding the Story,” is meant to help students with reading comprehension, narrative appreciation, plot adherence, and related matters. “Questions and Exercises for the Class,” the second section, aims to allow students to think more freely or comparatively about this novel—creatively expanding or elaborating on their ideas about the book—in a classroom setting or as part of an independent project. A supplementary section, “Other Readings and Resources,” is offered by way of conclusion.

**FOLLOWING AND  
UNDERSTANDING THE STORY**

1. Who is U. N. Owen? What do we learn about him in the novel’s opening pages?

2. Where does this story take place? Describe the primary setting of *And Then There Were None* with as much detail as possible. How and why is Indian Island so important to the narrative?
3. Identify the ten guests who have been invited to Indian Island, giving their names and backgrounds. Did any of these individuals—when you first encountered them in the introductory Cast of Characters, or in the following pages—strike you as especially sinister? Threatening? Harmless? If so, state which one(s) and explain why.
4. Describe the poem Vera Claythorne finds on display above the mantel in her bedroom (in chapter 2). What kind of poem is it? How are the poem's meaning and imagery changed by its context in this novel? How does it relate to the centerpiece of small china figures that first appears in the subsequent dinner scene (in chapter 3)? And how does this poem relate to the larger plot or structure of the novel?
5. In chapter 3, the ten guests are gathered for their after-dinner coffee when suddenly an “inhuman, penetrating” voice begins to speak to them, one which has been prerecorded on a phonograph record. What exactly does “The Voice” accuse each guest of doing?
6. Who dies at the end of chapter 4? Look again at the victim's last words, and then explain the irony or black comedy of this particular murder, given these final comments.
7. In part 5 of chapter 5 we learn the following about General Macarthur: “*He knew, suddenly, that he didn't want to leave the island.*” Why do you think he knows this? Provide as many reasons as you can. What is the general going through? Describe his state of mind—what it is, and what it might be.
8. How does Mrs. Rogers meet her demise in chapter 6? And why does Mr. Blore immediately suspect that Mrs. Rogers was killed by her husband, the butler? Explain Mr. Blore's accusation, pointing out its strengths and shortcomings.
9. In part 3 of chapter 7, Mr. Lombard and Dr. Armstrong discuss the two deaths that have occurred thus far. Why do they conclude that both deaths must have been acts of murder? How does this conclusion relate to the absence of Mr. Owen? And why do Mr. Lombard and Dr. Armstrong then agree to enlist Mr. Blore in their search mission? What and where do they plan to search?
10. Reread the last sentence of chapter 8. Identify the possible as well as the inevitable implications of this last sentence—for the plot of this novel and the fate of its characters. What sort of threshold has been crossed, and how is the story different from this point on?

11. After the murdered body of General Macarthur is discovered, the seven remaining characters participate in an informal yet serious court session to “establish the facts” of what has transpired since their arrival at Indian Island. Who is the leader of this parlor-room inquest? Does this appointment seem fitting? Why or why not? In light of the novel’s ending, why is the identity of the leader in this scene ironic? Also, how do the other six characters react to this leader’s questions and conclusions? And how do they react to one another’s accusations? In your view, who seemed most likely to be guilty at this point in the narrative, and who seemed most likely to be innocent?

12. In part 4 of chapter 10 we encounter Miss Emily Brent at work on her diary. She seems to be nodding off while sitting at the window and writing in her notebook. “The pencil straggled drunkenly in her fingers,” we read. “In shaking loose capitals she wrote: THE MURDERER’S NAME IS BEATRICE TAYLOR. . . . Her eyes closed. Suddenly, with a start, she awoke.” What do you make of this passage? What does it mean? Why would Miss Brent jot down such a statement? Think about what you have learned of Miss Brent’s background, mentality, spiritual outlook, and idea of right and wrong when answering these questions.

13. As chapter 11 begins, what is different about the arrangement of the china figure Indians in the dining room? How many are now in the table’s centerpiece—and what does this number tell you? How has Mr. Rogers been killed? At the end of this chapter, everyone is having a hearty breakfast, being “very polite” as they address one another, and “behaving normally” in all other ways. Does this make sense to you? Explain why or why not. What else is going on? Reread the conclusion of chapter 11 and then comment on the thoughts and fears these characters are experiencing.

14. How is Miss Brent murdered, and why is Dr. Armstrong immediately suspected of committing this crime? What telltale item in the doctor’s possession turns up missing? And what item originally in Mr. Lombard’s possession also disappears?

15. Five people are still alive as chapter 13 begins. In the second paragraph, we read: “And all of them, suddenly, looked less like human beings. They were reverting to more bestial types.” Explain this behavior, and provide several examples of it by referring to the text of the novel. Is this similar to how you yourself would behave if placed in this horrific situation? Explain why or why not.

16. Earlier in the narrative, both a ball of gray wool and a red shower curtain suddenly go missing. How and where do these items reappear? At the end of chapter 13, Mr. Lombard exclaims, “How Edward Seton would laugh if he were here! God, how he’d laugh!” Identify the implied, potential, and literal meanings of this “outburst [that] shocked and startled the others.”

17. The narrative of *And Then There Were None* seems to become more detailed—more carefully descriptive and deliberately paced—as it draws to a close. In chapter 14, for instance, we encounter extended interior monologues involving Miss Claythorne and ex-Inspector Blore. Why do you suppose the author begins to focus on her characters in this way, and at this moment in the tale? What do we learn from the private thoughts of these two characters? How do their ideas and impressions in chapter 14 advance the story?

18. What happens to Dr. Armstrong? How and when does he disappear? How is Mr. Blore murdered, and why do Miss Claythorne and Mr. Lombard suspect that Dr. Armstrong is Mr. Blore's killer? Also, when you reached the point where Miss Claythorne and Mr. Lombard are the only two characters remaining, which one did you think was the murderer? Or did you suspect someone else? Use quotes from the novel to support your answers. Finally, who kills Philip Lombard? And who, ultimately, is responsible for the death of Vera Claythorne?

19. Look again at the book's Epilogue. Who are the detectives in charge of solving these crimes? Are they able to come up with any answers? Evaluate their success, identifying the points on which they are correct and those on which they are incorrect in their reconstruction of the events on Indian Island.

20. Who is the murderer? How is his or her identity revealed? And who is the mysterious Mr. Owen? Were you satisfied with the novel's conclusion? And were you surprised by it? Did you, as a reader and an armchair detective, find the ending fully credible and plausible? Did the murderer's "confession" seem fitting and appropriate to you? Explain your answers.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES  
FOR THE CLASS

1. *And Then There Were None* is generally seen as one of the best mystery novels ever published. What are the clues in this mystery? What are the red herrings?

2. Consider the many narrative hooks in this novel—that is, the abrupt endings in several of the chapters (and parts of chapters) that feature a shocking note or detail that compels you to keep reading. How effective did you find these hooks? Was this book easy for you to read and understand, or did you find it difficult in any way? Justify your answers.

3. What is a motive? (Distinguish between the words *motive* and *motivation*. Consult a dictionary, if necessary.) What motives, if any, did each of the ten guests have for committing these horrible murders?

4. Who is telling the story of *And Then There Were None*? Did the tone, voice, or language employed by the narrator make the tale more frightening to you? Explain.

5. Think a bit more about *how* this story is told, especially its remarkable plot. What are the inherent problems a storyteller might encounter in killing off all of his or her main characters one by one? And what are the problems an author might face in basing his or her plot on a familiar nursery rhyme? Does Christie successfully avoid these problems? Defend your answer.

6. Which one of the killings depicted in the novel seemed especially accurate or believable to you, and which one seemed especially incredible or fantastic? As an exercise in creative writing, rewrite the former murder so that it is less realistic, and then rewrite the latter so that it is less far-fetched.

7. Discuss the depiction of group psychology in this novel, looking in particular at the scenes mentioned in questions 11, 13, and 15 above. Are there any other scenes where events or ideas are altered or influenced by how the characters interact with one another? Also, does the dynamic of group psychology in this novel strike you as realistic, frenzied, contrived, simplified, or otherwise? Explain your view with the aid of textual references. And were there moments when you as a reader thought the characters were acting in ways such as you yourself would have acted? If so, explain. If not, how and why would you have behaved differently?

8. The genre known as crime and mystery writing actually contains many fascinating variations and subcategories, among them detective novels, true crime accounts, police procedurals, and potboiler suspense stories. On your own, conduct some research—at your local library, in an encyclopedia, or on the Internet—and find out as much as you can about the many different kinds of mystery writing that have been invented. Then look again at *And Then There Were None* and try to label precisely what kind of mystery it is.

9. Sometimes a reader of “whodunits” (as mysteries are often called) will encounter what is known as a “locked room mystery,” which can be loosely defined as a story consisting of a riddle or puzzle that cannot be solved without paradoxically altering the very details, parameters, or “rules” of the story itself. Did this novel ever seem like a “locked room mystery” to you, especially as its conclusion drew nearer, or as you read the Epilogue? Explain.

10. As an independent exercise, compose an alternative ending for *And Then There Were None*. That is, reimagine and then rewrite the story’s conclusion, providing an alternative identity for the murderer as well as a new and wholly different set of motives for his or her actions.

As mysteries have been always been a favorite form of entertainment, and as *And Then There Were None* is considered one of history's finest mystery novels, there are countless examples of books, stories, plays, and films that invite comparison with Agatha Christie's novel. A fine place to start in this regard is, of course, Christie's own vast catalog. Any of the following Christie novels could be compared or contrasted with *And Then There Were None* in telling and enlightening ways: *The ABC Murders*, *Crooked House*, *Death on the Nile*, *Lord Edgware Dies*, *The Moving Finger*, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, *A Murder Is Announced*, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Ordeal by Innocence*, and *A Pocket Full of Rye*.

Teachers wishing to introduce their students to other classic writings of the crime and mystery genre would do well to assign works by Arthur Conan Doyle, who created in Sherlock Holmes literature's most celebrated detective. Several novels and short-story collections featuring the ever-popular Holmes are in print and available everywhere. Likewise the fiction of Edgar Allen Poe, who is generally thought to have invented the detective story. Other useful, instructive classics in this field include (but are by no means limited to) *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* by Charles Dickens, *Knight's Gambit* by William Faulkner, and *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier. The novels of "hardboiled" masters Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett are also recommended, as well as contemporary bestsellers by Dick Francis, Sue Grafton, P. D. James, and Robert B. Parker.

Various other media might also prove rewarding for those students who discover in Christie's novel an unknown taste for mysteries old and new. Teachers are encouraged to be creative when looking for TV shows, films, and other phenomena that might stand as echoes or updates of—or perhaps new twists on—the basic *And Then There Were None* pattern (a familiar stranded-amidst-an-unknown-assailant paradigm that turns up in popular culture fairly often). A few such materials might include *Clue*, the board game that has been popular for generations; the scary and teenager-friendly series of *Scream* movies; and even "Survivor," the recent and enormously successful television phenomenon. The relation of any of these constructs to the plot or personae of Christie's classic tale would be a solid starting point for all students interested in such extracurricular research and inquiry.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dame Agatha Christie (1890–1976) wrote over seventy detective novels, many of which feature her immortal sleuths Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. She also wrote plays and short stories over the course of a remarkable and highly influential career.

Scott Pitcock, who wrote this Teacher's Guide, lives and works in New York City.

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