

Death on the Nile

Agatha Christie



About the author

Born in Torquay, England in 1890, and having lost her father at the age of 10, Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was educated by her mother until she was sent to school in France, at the age of 16. When she was 24 she married Archie Christie, with whom she had a daughter, Rosalind. In 1926 her mother died and Agatha disappeared for a time, during which she stayed at Harrogate Hotel. She would later say that she had suffered from amnesia. In 1928, she divorced her first husband, and in 1930 she married Sir Max Edgar Lucien Mallowan, an archaeologist she had met on one of her trips. Encouraged by her mother to write since she was very young, Agatha became a prolific writer. She published over 70 books, mostly mystery novels and short stories. From her mystery novels, two characters have become particularly popular: Hercule Poirot, a sharp detective from Belgium; and Miss Jane Marple, an elderly spinster. *Death on the Nile*, written in 1937, is one in a large collection of novels that features Poirot. Other titles include *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936) and *Appointment with Death* (1938). She also wrote romances, children's books and theatre plays. One of the plays, *The Mousetrap*, has been running at a theatre in London for more than 56 consecutive years; the first performance was on 25 November, 1952. Agatha Christie received many awards, including the Mystery Writers of America Grand Master Award and The Order of the British Empire, Dame Commander. She died in London in 1976.

Summary

Linnet Ridgeway, a rich, beautiful young woman, has just married Simon Doyle, formerly engaged to Jacqueline de Bellefort. Linnet and Simon are on their honeymoon

cruise down the Nile in Egypt when they find that Jacqueline is following them, determined not to let them enjoy their happiness. Shortly after the trip has started, Linnet is found dead in her cabin and many of the passengers have a motive for wanting to kill her. As the famous Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, also on the boat, tries to disentangle what has happened, Linnet's maid is stabbed and Mrs Otterbourne, the writer, is murdered. It is through Poirot's intelligent reasoning that he manages to solve the mystery. Simon and Jacqueline are discovered to have carefully planned the murder and then found they needed to kill the other two victims.

Chapter 1: Linnet Ridgeway is 'the girl who has everything'. Rich, intelligent and beautiful, she has just bought a new property – Wode Hall, and Lord Windlesham wants to marry her. Her friend Joanna, who envies her position and is delighted with her pearls, is with her when Linnet's former classmate, Jacqueline de Bellefort, pays her a visit. Jackie is engaged to Simon Doyle, a handsome though poor young man. Not in a wealthy position herself, Jackie wants Linnet to employ Doyle as her land agent, so that they can marry and go to Egypt on their honeymoon. Linnet gives him the job, but eventually marries Doyle herself, and they go to Egypt for their honeymoon and stay at the Cataract Hotel. In the meantime, other people are on their way to Egypt. There are Linnet's lawyers; Mr Pennington, from the USA, and Jim Fanthorp, from England, who look after her financial interests; Joanna Southwood, one of Linnet's friends, who is interested in her pearls; Tim Allerton, Joanna's cousin, and his mother, Mrs Allerton; an engineer, whose plans to marry Linnet's former maid even though he's already married, have been thwarted by Linnet; Mrs Otterbourne, a frustrated writer of cheap novels and her daughter, Rosalie; Miss Van Schuyler, an arrogant American lady with her niece, Cornelia Robson, and her secretary, Miss Bowers; and Dr Bessner. Hercule Poirot, a retired detective, is also on his way, as is his friend Colonel Race who is in search of a violent political leader.

Chapter 2: Once in Egypt, Linnet and Simon find that Jackie, who has threatened to kill them, is now following them. At Linnet's request, Poirot, who has been told the story, tries to persuade Jackie to abandon her ideas of revenge, but Jackie says that she and Simon loved each other and she must keep on. Simon and Linnet try to escape from Jackie by taking a cruise up the Nile on the steamboat, *Karnak*. To their surprise, they meet Jackie on

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board. Poirot, Mr Pennington, Miss Van Schuyler, Cornelia, Miss Bowers, Tim and Mrs Allerton, Mrs Otterbourne and Rosalie are also on the *Karnak*. During these first days in Egypt, Mr Pennington tries to make Linnet sign some documents without her reading them but Mr Fanthorp advises her not to sign. Rosalie and Mr Ferguson, a passenger, express their dislike of Linnet. Tim Allerton does not seem to like Poirot, Miss Van Schuyler displays her arrogance, and Cornelia finds some peace of mind listening to Dr Bessner, another passenger on the ship.

Chapter 3: The ship arrives at Abu Simbel where the passengers can visit the temple. Linnet and Simon are resting in the sun when sliding rocks almost kill Linnet. Simon thinks someone was trying to kill them but everybody concludes it must have been an accident. Back on the ship, Linnet mistakenly opens a telegram for Mr Richetti, another passenger, and he reacts quite rudely towards her. Colonel Race, an officer working for the British government, joins the trip. He is an old acquaintance of Poirot's and tells him he's trying to find a violent political leader. Poirot tells him about Linnet, Simon and Jackie and the accident; he's afraid something may happen. On the second evening in Abu Simbel, after Poirot and Linnet have gone to sleep, Jackie, half drunk, shoots Simon in the leg. Simon asks Mr Fanthorp and Cornelia to take Jackie to Miss Bowers and ask her to take care of Jackie. He also asks them to fetch Dr Bessner and to say nothing to his wife. He can't walk so he is taken to the doctor's cabin. Fanthorp looks for the pistol that Jackie had dropped in the lounge, but can't find it. In the morning, Linnet is found dead in her cabin, a bullet in her head, killed between 12 and 2 a.m. There is a big letter J painted on the wall.

Chapter 4: Mr Poirot and Colonel Race interview all the passengers on board. Linnet's maid, Louise Bourget, who found Linnet's body that morning, doesn't know whether Linnet's pearls, which have disappeared, were in the cabin the night before. She tells Poirot that an engineer on board, Mr Fleetwood, was probably angry at Linnet for having advised her former maid, Marie, to break off her engagement to him. But Fleetwood says he is innocent and has spent the night in his cabin. So have Mrs Allerton and Tim, Mrs Otterbourne and Rosalie, Miss Van Schuyler, Mr Richetti, Mr Pennington and Mr Ferguson – one more passenger who is permanently expressing his dislike of the wealthy, whom he finds useless. Miss Van Schuyler, however, says she saw Rosalie throw something overboard at about

one o'clock in the morning which Rosalie denies. Mr Fanthorp and Cornelia's recollection of the events in the lounge the night before provides Jackie and Simon with alibis. Simon mentions George Wode's anger at Linnet for having bought his house, and Lord Windleham's possible annoyance at having been rejected by Linnet. He adds that there is a passenger on board whose father lost money while doing business with Linnet's father. The pistol, which had disappeared from the lounge, is found in the water, wrapped in a velvet shawl through which it has been shot. Several passengers had heard a splash during the night.

Chapter 5: While Poirot is working on the case, inspecting the cabins in search of the pearls, he finds the body of Louise, a piece of a hundred-pound note in her hand. She was blackmailing the murderer. Poirot finally reveals how the murders have been committed and who has committed them. It was Simon and Jacqueline who had carefully planned the murder of Linnet so that Simon would inherit her money and they could then get married. Jackie had not in fact aimed the gun at Simon. He had only pretended to be wounded and used a handkerchief with red ink to convince witnesses that he had been shot. He had then made sure that he and Jackie had an alibi and, while Fanthorp had gone to fetch Dr Bessner in the belief that Simon could not walk, had taken the gun, killed Linnet in her cabin, shot himself in the leg and thrown the gun overboard. But Louise had seen him, so Jackie had taken a surgical knife from Dr Bessner's cabin and killed her. Things went wrong again, however, as Mrs Otterbourne had seen her on her way back, so Jackie had shot her with Pennington's gun.

Poirot also finds out that Tim had substituted the real pearls for a copy that Joanne had had made, and Colonel Race found that the political leader he was looking for was Richetti. When the steam ship arrives in Shellal, Jackie shoots Simon and then herself.

Background and themes

Hercule Poirot is a detective from Belgium, gifted with an acute sense of observation and a capacity to draw intelligent conclusions from watching people's behaviour and linking it to deeply human psychological traits and the context in which stories occur. *Death on the Nile* is one of the novels by Agatha Christie in which we see him use his sharp wits to solve an intricate mystery.

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Social background: As in most of her novels, many of the characters in *Death on the Nile* are upper-class and well-off, and the murderers are driven by both passion and ambition. As the complex plot develops, the reader is provided with clues to the crimes through the description of the characters' actions and points of view, and is shown how their lives are driven by jealousy, love, ambition, arrogance, faithfulness and unfaithfulness, frustration or boredom. Each character has a personal history that affects his or her behaviour and decisions and the story is full of possible motives for murder, which makes the plot rich, intriguing and extremely complex.

The idea that life should be filled with hope about the future rather than resentment about the past is a constant theme in the story, which closes with Poirot's disappointment that Jackie hadn't followed his advice.

Discussion activities

Chapter 1, pages 1–11

Before reading

- 1 **Guess:** Tell students: *In this opening chapter you are going to meet these four people: Linnet, Jackie, Charles and Simon. A woman and a man are rich, and a woman and a man are poor. A man and a woman get married. If all the sentences below are false, who marries who? Who is rich and who is poor?*
- Jackie marries the man she loves.
 - Linnet is poor.
 - Simon is rich.
 - The rich man marries one of the women.
- Give the students a blank grid (see Key) if necessary.

After reading

- 2 **Discuss:** Remind students that detective Poirot says that 'man invented work to avoid having to think' (page 5). Have them discuss in groups what they think man wants to avoid thinking about, why, and whether they agree with Poirot's assertion. Groups then share their ideas.
- 3 **Write:** In groups, students write a scene describing Linnet and Simon's wedding.
- 4 **Role play:** Students take the roles of Jackie and Simon and role play their last conversation before Simon's marriage.
- 5 **Research:** Tell students to search the internet to find information about Mayfair, the area where Joanne plans to open a shop.
- 6 **Discuss:** Tell students: *Linnet marries Jackie's boy friend, with whom Jackie was deeply in love. Is it right to start a relationship with a friend's boyfriend/girlfriend if one falls in love with him/her, or should such a relationship be avoided from the beginning at any cost?* Have students discuss the question.

- 7 **Write:** In groups, students make a list of Joanne's actions in Chapter 1 and choose an adjective to describe her personality based on those actions. Groups share their lists and ideas about her and write a paragraph describing her.
- 8 **Write:** Play a few scenes from the opening episode of Andy Wilson's TV serial *Death on the Nile* without the sound. Have students watch the scenes carefully, discuss who each character is and what is happening and create the dialogues for them. Then they compare their scripts to the original ones.
- 9 **Artwork, game:** In groups, students draw objects that they think represent one of the characters they have met in this chapter. Groups exchange their drawings. Each group tries to find out who the character represented by another group's drawing is and explains why they think so.
- 10 **Guess:** Tell students: *You know that in this story there is at least one murder. From the information you have so far, who do you think the victim will be? Who is the murderer? Will the murderer have any accomplices? Do you think a good mystery novel gives clues from the first chapter?*
- 11 **Discuss:** Remind students that Poirot says, when watching Jackie and Simon celebrating Simon's new job, that he sees a woman who loves a man and a man who allows himself to be loved (page 5). Ask them: *Does the story so far suggest he was right? Why?*

Chapter 2, pages 11–32

Before reading

- 12 **Guess:** Ask students: *Why do you think Mrs Otterbourne's trip to Egypt is a matter of life or death? Whose life or death may be involved?*

After reading

- 13 **Write:** Tell students to imagine that on the boat there is a journalist who is following the famous Linnet on her honeymoon and sending articles to her magazine about what is happening. Divide the class into groups. Each writes one short article. Groups read their articles to the class and the class votes for the one that will probably sell the most magazines. Together, they choose an attractive title for it.
- 14 **Group work, discuss:** Divide the class into groups. Tell students: *The following statements are made in this chapter. Do you agree with them? Write numbers 1–5 next to them. 1 means you fully agree and 5 means you completely disagree.* Groups report their conclusions and the other students discuss their ideas and justify them.
- 'A great force of emotion is always frightening' (page 24).
 - 'Mothers are particularly dangerous when their children are in trouble.' (page 24).
 - 'Motives for murder are not always grand' (page 25).

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- 'One must follow one's star, wherever it leads.'
(page 29).
 - 'You've got to destroy before you can build up.'
(page 31).
- 15 Read carefully, role play:** Ask students to read carefully what Rosalie tells Poirot about her feelings when leaving for Nubia (page 26). Then they imagine she shares the dinner table with Mrs Allerton, who asks her if she plans to have children and what she thinks of being a mother. Students role play their conversations.
- 16 Pair work:** In pairs, students choose the music they would use in a film version of the novel for the scene in which Poirot speaks with Jacqueline about her revenge (section 4; pages 18–19). Pairs explain to the class the reasons for their choice.
- 17 Artwork:** In groups, students make a poster for a travel agency offering the trip on the *Karnak* from Shellal to Wadi Halfa based on what they know about it from the text. Posters are displayed on the classroom's walls and students decide which makes the trip more attractive.
- 18 Research:** Students search the internet for information about the Elephantine Island. Then they discuss whether they would like to visit it and what they would like to see.
- 19 Pairs work, guess:** Tell students: *After Linnet and Simon met Jackie on the Karnak, Poirot heard Simon say: 'Lin, we've got to go on with it now ...' (page 27). Later, after his conversation with Jackie and back in his cabin, Poirot overhears Simon saying 'We've got to go on with it now ...?' (page 29). What do you think Simon is talking about? What do you think 'it' refers to? Is it the same in both cases?* In pairs, students discuss the questions and keep their answers. Their predictions can be displayed on the classroom walls to be checked later.
- 20 Discuss:** Tell students: *The young man on the hotel boat said to Poirot that the wonders of Egypt made him sick because they had cost the lives of many poor workers who had worked on building them, and added that 'human beings matter more than stones' and that 'the future is more important than the past' (page 25). Have the class discuss whether safety conditions have really improved for workers all over the world and in their country, and whether the study of the past, which is partly done through the remains of past civilisations, is the key to improving the future of mankind.*
- 21 Role play:** Tell students to imagine that Rosalie and Cornelia meet on the deck and speak about how they feel on this trip. Students role play their conversation.
- 22 Write and role play:** In pairs, students write a short scene in which Linnet and Jackie meet on the deck and have a short conversation. The pairs then role play their scenes.
- Chapter 3, pages 33–44**
- Before reading**
- 23 Guess:** Ask students to read the title of the chapter and predict which tragedy it refers to.
- After reading**
- 24 Group work:** Tell students: *On page 33 we see Pennington lying to Poirot. What is his lie? Why do you think he tells a lie to a detective? Do you think there may be a connection between this lie and Poirot's question to Simon about his wife's age on page 22? If so, what may that connection be?* Students make their guesses and keep their answers. Their predictions can be displayed on the classroom walls to be checked later.
- 25 Write:** Students write Linnet's thoughts in a paragraph to be inserted after '... How warm – how safe ... how lovely to be me – me ... me ... Linnet ...' on page 34. Then they read their paragraphs to the class and they vote which best describes Linnet's personality.
- 26 Write:** Tell students that the journalist on the steamboat (activity 13) writes an article under the headline: *Rich Linnet Doyle escapes death in Abu Simbel*. The article describes the accident (page 34) and includes speculations about what happened.
- 27 Guess:** Ask students what the telegram for Mr Richetti that Linnet mistakenly opens says, and to find a reason why a man would receive a telegram like this. Pairs share their answers and keep them. Their predictions can be displayed on the classroom walls to be checked later.
- 28 Guess:** In groups, students make a list of the possible passengers they think could be the violent leader that Colonel Race is looking for. They share their lists with the class, justify their choices and keep their answers. Their predictions can be displayed on the classroom walls to be checked later.
- 29 Discuss:** Tell students: *There is a proverb that says 'A barking dog never bites'. What does Colonel Race say that could be expressed with this proverb? Do you agree with him? Do you agree with the proverb? Why? Why not?* (Colonel Race refers to Jackie's threat to kill Simon and Linnet. He says that women who talk about what they are going to do, don't do it.)
- 30 Research:** Tell students that the line Jackie sings while drinking on the lounge (*'He was her man and did her wrong'*; page 40) is probably a reference to the 100-year-old song *'Frankie and Johnnie'*. Ask them to search the Internet for the lyrics and then discuss if they think the song was appropriate for the scene. (See key for the lyrics.)
- 31 Pair work, write:** Tell students: *On page 40 we read that Cornelia told Jacqueline 'every detail of her life'. Pairs write the story of Cornelia's life. Then they share their stories and vote for the one that seems to fit the best with her behaviour.*

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- 32 Group work, guess:** In groups, students discuss who killed Linnet and why. Tell them to consider that
- Miss Van Schuyler's velvet shawl disappeared from the lounge;
 - Jackie's gun disappeared from the lounge;
 - Poirot was very sleepy and goes to his cabin before the crime is committed.

Groups write their versions of what happened and keep them to see which group is closest to what really happened. Their versions of the crime can be displayed on the classroom walls to be checked later.

Chapter 4, pages 44–62

Before reading

- 33 Guess:** Tell students: *Make a list of suspects from the information you have so far. Then check if your suspicions match Poirot's.*

After reading

- 34 Group work, write:** In groups, students write the notes Poirot and Race took – as they interviewed the passengers – about where they were or what they were doing at what time. Students then order their notes chronologically, and if necessary, modify their versions of the crime in activity 32. Their new hypotheses can be displayed on the classroom walls to be checked later. Draw the following chart on the blackboard for them.

Time	Passenger	Notes

- 35 Discuss:** Remind students of the motives for crimes that Poirot lists when he speaks with Mrs Allerton (page 25). Have them discuss which they think may have been the motive for Linnet's murder and which they think is out of the question and why.
- 36 Write:** Tell students to imagine that after they were interviewed by Poirot and Race, all passengers went to the lounge. Students write a short scene describing what each did or said as he/she arrived in the lounge.
- 37 Pair work:** Tell students: *Imagine that somebody found the pistol, got frightened and got rid of it. Decide who this person was and how she or he made the pistol disappear. The class votes for the most original idea.*
- 38 Read carefully, pair work:** Students read carefully Mrs Otterbourne's ideas about the crime and create a story in which jealousy and sex are the motives for the crime. Pairs narrate their stories to the class, who vote for the most original.
- 39 Artwork:** Tell students that the journalist on the ship (activities 13 and 26) manages to get to the crime scene and makes a drawing of what she sees for her magazine. In groups, students make her drawing.
- 40 Discuss:** Tell students: *Mr Ferguson thinks that nobody, no matter how rich one is, should live a life that contributes nothing to the world. Divide the class into two groups and have them discuss the issue.*

- 41 Role play:** Tell students to imagine that Jackie visits Doyle as he rests in Dr Bessner's room. Students role play their conversation.

Chapter 5, pages 62–88

Before reading

- 42 Guess:** Tell students: *More people are going to die before the case is solved. Who do you think they are? Is there anybody you would like not to die and to be innocent? Who? Why?*
- 43 Guess:** Tell students there's a proverb in English that says 'Let your heart rule your head'. Ask them who they think let their heart rule their head. Students write the name/s and share their answers with another student.

After reading

- 44 Discuss:** Ask students to look up the word 'kleptomaniac' in their dictionaries. Ask them who suffers from this condition. Then have them discuss what should be done about people who suffer from this condition; for example, people who take things from shops without paying for them even if they're rich. Ask them: *Should they be put in prison? Should they be forgiven? Should they be obliged to have psychological treatment?*
- 45 Read carefully, pair work:** Ask student to read carefully what Mrs Otterbourne was saying just before she was murdered (pages 71–72) and to complete the details she avoids mentioning. Ask them who they think she had a meeting with, what they think she had ordered and then bought and why they think she didn't mention these details. Pairs share their stories and the class votes for the funniest one.
- 46 Discuss:** Ask students: *What are Miss Van Schuyler's ideas about a suitable man to marry Cornelia? What makes her change her ideas about Mr Ferguson? Is it right that parents or older relatives worry about the social and economic position of their children's future husbands or wives?*
- 47 Check:** Ask students to explain why Pennington had lied and what he had lied about. Then have them check their answers to activity 24. Did anybody make the right prediction?
- 48 Discuss:** Tell students: *On page 79 we read how Poirot solved the mystery of the pearls. How do you think he found that the pearls were in the rosary and the copy had come in a book? Do you think Poirot's reasoning and 'discovery' is believable? Then, on page 81, Race finds who the violent political leader is because he knows a secret code that the reader does not. Do you think that, in a mystery novel, it is 'fair to the reader' that the detectives have information that the reader does not?*