

SUMMARIES

Part 1: Chapters 1–8

Rex Fortescue, a powerful businessman, is having a cup of tea at work when he becomes ill. He is rushed to hospital but later dies. Tests show he was poisoned. Detective Inspector Neele leads the police investigation. He finds out that taxine – the poison from yew berries – was used.

Police interview the staff at work and at home, followed by his family. Not many people seemed to like Fortescue. The police discover that one of Fortescue's pockets contains a lot of rye. Neele meets Mary Dove, the efficient and calm young housekeeper. She gives him lots of useful information.

Rex Fortescue's oldest son, Percival, lives at the house with his wife Jennifer. He says that his father had been acting strangely and making bad business decisions. Lance, his other son, left after an argument, and lives in East Africa with his wife. However, Rex had invited him home, and he is on his way. His daughter, Elaine, also lives at home. She wants to marry Gerald, but her father has forbidden this because of his communist beliefs.

His young wife Adele can't be reached – she is playing golf with Vivian Dubois, her lover.

Mrs Ramsbottom, the sister of Fortescue's first wife, lives upstairs – she is angry about the wickedness she sees at home.

Part 2: Chapters 9–13

Neele meets Lance and his wife at the airport to tell them about the murder. Lance goes to the house to visit the family.

Vivian worries about letters he wrote to Adele, and doesn't want the police to find them. He decides to go to Yewtree Lodge secretly and destroy them.

Mary Dove sees someone in the garden. The parlourmaid, Gladys, is taking in the tea tray to the family in the library, when she disappears outside. Just then Lance arrives, causing everyone great surprise. He talks to everybody, including Mrs Ramsbottom. She thinks Gladys knows something about the murder. People are wondering where she is, when Mary Dove finds Adele dead in the library, poisoned with cyanide.

The police return. Neele is looking through Gladys's things, and finds letters from her boyfriend Albert, when her body is discovered in the garden. Someone has strangled her, and put a clothes peg on her nose.

The elderly Miss Marple comes to Yewtree Lodge. She knows Gladys and is angered by her murder, and wants to help investigate. She tells Neele an old nursery rhyme that she thinks is important, and tells him to find out about blackbirds. Neele concentrates on the events on the night of the murders, so he interviews the staff again. A jar of marmalade containing taxine is found in the garden. Mary Dove tells him that blackbirds had been left on Fortescue's desk, and put in a pie – so Miss Marple's idea seems correct.

Part 3: Chapters 14–21

Neele pursues the fact that Mary Dove saw someone in the garden, and he finds mud in Adele's bedroom. He realizes Vivian came to get the letters. He talks to Jennifer, who tells him that Adele had recently made a new will.

Neele asks Percival about the blackbirds and discovers a family story of the Blackbird Mine – one of Fortescue's investments that didn't work. Neele gets more information from Mrs Ramsbottom, who says his friend MacKenzie died there, and his widow wanted revenge.

Adele's new will left all her money to Vivian. When Neele interviews Vivian, he realizes Vivian knew this. Neele also interviews Gerald, who is to marry Elaine. The person Mary Dove saw in the garden was tall and dark-haired, like both Gerald and Vivian.

The family lawyer says the business was close to bankruptcy. Fortescue had made risky business decisions. A clause in his will leaves his money to Percival if Adele dies within a month of Fortescue. Lance tells Percival that he wants to be involved in the firm, but they disagree on how to run it.

Neele tracks down Mrs MacKenzie in a sanatorium. She is still angry about her husband's death and has cut her daughter Ruby off for not taking revenge on Fortescue.

Part 4: Chapters 22–27

Lance goes to his father's offices, where he tells Neele that he isn't going to return to the business, but wants to annoy Percival. Percival arrives, and Neele asks him if he had thought his father was ill, and what he had wanted to do about it.

Neele tries to work out the puzzle, but for Miss Marple, things are becoming clearer. She talks to Neele about the three murders, and they agree that Gladys must have been murdered before Adele, and that her death was only done to protect the murderer – it didn't have any financial benefit. This means that the nursery rhyme hasn't been followed exactly, and the murders are staged by a sane person.

Miss Marple tells Neele that Gladys put the taxine in Fortescue's marmalade, but that she didn't realize what she was doing. She explains her suspicions about Albert, and how the murders could have been committed. Miss Marple thinks the Blackbird Mine story is fake, and that the killer is Lance. Lance has discovered that the mine is worth a fortune and is determined to get it. She has also realized who Ruby MacKenzie really is.

Neele is convinced by the story, but has no proof. When Miss Marple goes home, she finds a letter from Gladys, with a photo of Lance in it. The letter explains everything just as Miss Marple suspected, and is all the proof Neele needs.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 1 (Chapters 1–8)

Before reading

1 Guess

Talk about the title of the book with the class. Ask if anyone knows what **rye** is, and allow them to look it up in dictionaries. They can then think about the meaning of the title, although at this stage it may not seem to mean very much. It may help students' appreciation of the story if you don't reveal the full significance of the title yet but rather let them discover it themselves at the appropriate time.

However, you can discuss the idea of poisoning. Ask if the students know of any poisonous substances in the natural world which should be avoided, such as berries and plants. Don't refer to the Cultural notes yet, as this will reveal the second murder, but you could tell them that Christie knew a lot about different poisons as she worked as a pharmacist. Ask them to research possible poisonous substances and keep a note of these.

2 Research

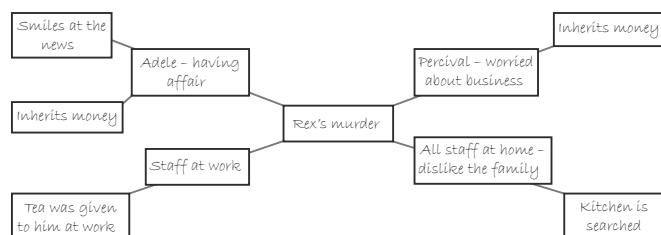
Explain that some of the main characters in this story are very rich, and that their money comes from an investment business. Ask students if they understand what this means, and discuss a definition as a class or allow them time to look it up. They can refer to the Cultural notes section on **Stocks, shares and investments**. Allow students time to read this and any other sources you may have, then discuss with the class what kind of business this is. Is it safe, or risky? What do they think about the world of finance – would it be easy, for example, to make a lot of enemies in this business, or are people generally fair and considerate?

Ask what the risks associated with investing are, and point out that just as you can make a lot of money quickly, you can also lose it.

After reading

3 Playing detective

Remind students that a good way to summarize and process a lot of information is to make a mind map about it. Draw the following example on the board:



Show how they can list the characters and events, add details as necessary, and link anything that seems significant. Arranging information visually can be very useful for some learners, and it can help readers to think about how events are connected in a non-linear way.

Ask students for suggestions about what they could add to this map, then ask them to make their own mind map about the events and characters in the first part of the book.

4 Comprehension

In this section we find out that Rex Fortescue was not a very popular man. Ask students to match the characters with the things they say about him, or the descriptions of how they felt about him.

1 Miss Griffith	a On her lips was a very small smile.
2 Percival	b 'He was a horrible man. Anybody might have done it.'
3 Adele	c She was not, Neele noted, at all upset.
4 Miss Ramsbottom	d 'She dislikes – disliked him a lot, I think.'
5 Mary Dove	e 'It's exactly like all his behaviour lately – crazy! It's got to be stopped.'
6 Jennifer	f 'Rex Fortescue was a sinful man and I never liked him.'

5 Comprehension

Refer students to the account of the will on page 25. Ask students to summarize the main points of this, perhaps in diagram form. They should keep these notes to refer back to later.

6 Speaking

Based on the notes from 4 and 5 above, ask students who they think killed Rex. Ask them to give reasons for their ideas. They can discuss this in pairs or groups first, then as a class. Encourage them to use examples from the text to support their ideas.

A Pocket Full of Rye

Agatha Christie

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 2 (Chapters 9–13)

Before reading

1 Playing detective

Ask students to recap the main points of the previous section. Ask them to imagine they are Neele, and are investigating the case. Draw the following notepad outline and examples on the board:

Who? Adele
How involved? Married to Rex, not in love with him
Able to give him poison? Yes
Motive? To get his money and to marry Vivian

Ask students to complete similar notes for the other characters. They can add to these as the story progresses.

2 Research

Refer students to the Cultural notes section on **The British class system**. There is a lot of useful information here about the era and the household in which this story is based. Ask students to think about the potential conflicts which such a system could lead to – for example, might there be any resentment towards the Fortescues because of their money? How is this situation different to the modern world? Explain to students that they will meet the character referred to here, Miss Marple, in Part 2, and that she is one of Agatha Christie's most famous characters.

After reading

3 Playing detective

Ask students to make a timeline of the events on the evening of the double murder. They should put the events they know about in order, and study the text carefully for clues. Draw the following example on the board:

4.40 Gladys gets tea tray ready	Clock rings 5.00, Gladys takes tray to hall	Adele is found	Gladys is found
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Ask students to complete it with further details about the events. They should turn their paper to a landscape orientation so they can fit more detail on. They can add to this as the story develops.

Ask students whether they think this is a useful way to investigate a case.

4 Comprehension

In this section we meet Miss Marple, the famous investigator. Ask students to give details of her personality and appearance. Ask: *Why does she want to be involved in the case? In what way does she help Neele from the beginning?* Go through the nursery rhyme which Miss Marple says on page 44. Ask students to explain how each of the points in it are significant. You can now review the story title as well.

5 Language

Ask students how Vivian Dubois really feels about Adele, and how we know this. Refer them to the passage on page 29:

Even if Adele had not already burnt his letters, would she have the sense to burn them now? Where did she keep them? Probably in that sitting room of hers upstairs in that fake antique desk. She had said there was a secret drawer in it. Secret drawer! That wouldn't fool the police for long.

Point out that his tone is quite scornful, using 'fake' antique desk to highlight the class division which students studied in 'Before reading 2'. Ask them to interpret the way he feels about her explanation of a secret drawer.

Ask: *What does he decide to do about this?* Do they think he is the person who Mary Dove sees in the garden? What might he be doing?

Ask students to think about Lance's opinion of Mary Dove. Refer them to the conversation on page 32:

'And who's the young lady with the soft voice and sweet face who let me in? What goes on behind it, I wouldn't like to say.'

'That,' said Jennifer, 'is Mary Dove. She looks after everything for us.'

'Does she, now?'

Adele said, 'She's really very useful.'

'But what is so nice,' said Jennifer, 'is that she knows her place.'

'Clever Mary Dove,' said Lance, and took another piece of chocolate cake.

What does Lance mean by this – is he giving her a straightforward compliment, or does he have another meaning? How do we know?

A Pocket Full of Rye

Agatha Christie

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 3 (Chapters 14–21)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Inspector Neele was not going to let this blackbird business take his attention away from the logical investigation of murder by a sane murderer for a sane reason. But of course he would still consider the crazier possibilities of the case. (page 48)

Discuss one of the key themes of this story with the students – the opposition between reason and imagination, or logic and madness. Divide the table in half and ask students to think of characters, quotes or events which could go in each half. You can give them the following example:

Imagination/Madness	Reason/Logic
Miss Marple explains the case with a nursery rhyme	Neele asks questions to establish what everyone was doing

Read out the following text:

Neele was silent for a moment, enjoying a mental image of Miss Dove collecting yew berries in a little basket. With a sigh he returned to the present.

Explain how this shows that although Neele is a detective, he has a strong imagination as well. This extract shows him changing from his imaginative view to his more reasoned one. Ask students whether they think this will help him find the murderer. You could ask students to look for other occasions where Neele does this.

2 Comprehension

Ask the students the following questions about the previous section:

- 1 Why wasn't Neele satisfied with the explanation that Adele and her lover had killed Rex?
- 2 How does Miss Marple describe Gladys?
- 3 What was Gladys wearing when she went out?
- 4 What does Sergeant Hay find in the garden?
- 5 What did Mary Dove hear upstairs?
- 6 What has happened in the past connected to blackbirds?

Students can discuss their ideas in pairs before you have a class discussion.

After reading

3 Speaking

In this section, the story of the Blackbird Mine is explained. Ask students what a gold mine is, and why Rex would have invested in it. How does it affect the case now – which new characters are introduced because of it? Students can discuss their ideas in groups.

4 Comprehension

Refer students back to the notes they made about Rex Fortescue's will in Part 1. They can now summarize Adele's will in the same way, and see how this changes things. Who benefits from Adele's death? When did Adele write her new will?

5 Listening

Play the section of the audio where Inspector Neele interviews Vivian Dubois (pages 56–58). Ask students to think about how Vivian's attitude changes as the conversation progresses, and why this is. Why doesn't Vivian want to admit that he was at Yewtree Lodge? What worse crime does Neele suspect him of?

Then play the interview between Neele and Gerald Wright (pages 58–60). Ask students: *What kind of person is Gerald Wright? Why does Neele think it might have been him in the garden of Yewtree Lodge?*

6 Comprehension

Ask students to complete the following table with the correct character names.

	Pat Fortescue	Miss Ramsbottom	Inspector Neele
	Lance Fortescue	Mrs MacKenzie	Jennifer Fortescue
	Miss Marple	Ruby MacKenzie	Vivian Dubois

Who...	... said he went to play golf on the night Adele was murdered?	
	... thinks Miss Marple knows how to organize things properly?	
	... saw Adele coming out of the solicitor's office?	
	... has been married twice before?	
	... visited Rex Fortescue many years earlier?	
	... doesn't think there will be any more murders?	
	... has made her mother very angry?	
	... found three letters in a secret drawer?	
	... is the first person to tell Inspector Neele about the Blackbird Mine?	
	... thinks that Rex Fortescue's death saved the firm from bankruptcy?	

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 4 (Chapters 22–27)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Remind the students of the discussion from Part 3, 'Before reading'. Ask them to think about why the murderer wants the events to look like the work of an insane person, rather than a sane one. Allow them to discuss their ideas, then point out or confirm that the death penalty was in place at this time in Britain. If the murderer appeared to be insane, he or she would be confined in an asylum rather than executed.

At this point in the story, do Neele and Miss Marple believe that the murderer is sane or insane?

2 Playing detective

At the end of the previous section, Miss Marple has long conversations with Jennifer and with Pat. Ask students to read these again carefully, and think about what information she learns from them. Are there any hints about other characters here?

Ask students to make notes about each conversation. Write the following example on the board and ask students to complete the information.

Jennifer is very unhappy is lonely doesn't like living with the family	Pat is scared
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After reading

3 Speaking

Say to the class: *Were you surprised to learn that Lance was the murderer?* Ask students to discuss in groups how this compared to their own ideas of who the murderer was. Ask students to go back through Miss Marple's analysis of the case, starting on page 86. Ensure they can follow her reasoning, and ask questions to check understanding:

- 1 Why did Gladys get the job at Yewtree Lodge?
- 2 Why did Albert send her postcards?
- 3 Why was Gladys a good target for 'Albert'?
- 4 How did Gladys feel when Rex Fortescue died?

Students can answer these questions in pairs before you have a class discussion.

4 Comprehension

Answer the following questions:

- 1 Who does Inspector Neele think Albert Evans is at first?
- 2 What was the purpose of the blackbirds and the clothes peg?

- 3 Why did Miss Marple start to suspect Lance?
- 4 Why did Jennifer marry Percival?
- 5 What does Neele discover about Mary Dove?
- 6 What did Mary Dove do to Jennifer Fortescue?
- 7 What advice does Miss Marple give to Pat?
- 8 How does Neele get the proof he needs?

5 Speaking

Discuss Gladys's letter with the class. Ask students to think about how effective Miss Marple is as an investigator. Why is she so good? What skills does she have that allow her to work out what happened in a situation so precisely? Ask students how they think Neele will feel when he gets this piece of evidence.

6 Writing

Ask students to imagine they are Mary Dove. Ask them to write a letter to a friend in which she explains:

- what happened at the house
- how she was involved
- what she is going to do now.

They can use the following notes to help them.

Ruth

working for a horrible family / three people are murdered / police investigate / they think I am someone else / I blackmail a woman I work for / my plan is discovered / I have to give the money back / I need to find a new job

Suggest an appropriate word limit.

ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

Part 1 (Chapters 1–8)

1 Guess

Answers will vary.

2 Research

Answers will vary.

3 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

4 Comprehension

- 1 c
- 2 e
- 3 a
- 4 f
- 5 b
- 6 d

5 Comprehension

£100,000 to Adele; £50,000 to Elaine; everything else to Percival. Nothing to Lance.

6 Speaking

Answers will vary.

Part 2 (Chapters 9–13)

1 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

2 Research

Answers will vary.

3 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

4 Comprehension

Vivian thinks that Adele is stupid to believe that the police won't find her secret drawer. He does not have a high opinion of her intelligence.

Lance thinks that Mary Dove is hiding something – this is shown in the phrase 'What goes on behind it, I wouldn't like to say.' 'Clever Mary Dove' does not mean that she is clever for knowing her place, it means that she is clever enough to make people think she knows her place. Lance is speaking in contrast to the other characters, Adele and Jennifer, who are being direct.

5 Language

Answers will vary.

Part 3 (Chapters 14–21)

1 Speaking

The idea of imagination/madness is discussed by Pat and Miss Marple on page 39. On page 43, Miss Marple looks for a pattern in a creative way, which Neele has not managed in his analysis.

There are several instances where Neele shows his more imaginative side, such as on page 45 where he visualizes the marmalade being thrown outside.

Students may have other suggestions as well.

2 Comprehension

- 1 It seemed too easy.
- 2 A silly girl, who wanted a man and who would do anything she was told to do. Miss Marple felt responsible for her and sorry for her.
- 3 A good pair of nylon stockings and her best shoes.
- 4 A jar of marmalade with taxine in it.
- 5 She thought she heard footsteps.
- 6 Blackbirds were put on Rex Fortescue's desk and in a pie.

3 Speaking

Answers will vary.

4 Comprehension

Adele leaves everything she has to Vivian. She will get £100,000 from Rex, so he will get this.

5 Listening

Vivian starts off nervous, then gets angry, then starts to panic. He doesn't want to admit that he took the letters. Neele suspects him of murder.

Gerald is quite arrogant. He has no alibi for the murder and his appearance fits the person Mary saw.

6 Comprehension

- 1 Vivian Dubois
- 2 Miss Ramsbottom
- 3 Jennifer Fortescue
- 4 Pat Fortescue
- 5 Mrs MacKenzie
- 6 Miss Marple
- 7 Ruby MacKenzie
- 8 Inspector Neele
- 9 Lance Fortescue
- 10 Percival Fortescue

Part 4 (Chapters 22–27)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

3 Speaking

- 1 In order to get close to Rex Fortescue.
- 2 To remind her of the date.
- 3 She would do anything for the person she loved.
- 4 She was very worried.

4 Comprehension

- 1 Mrs MacKenzie's missing son Donald.
- 2 To create the impression that the murders were part of a revenge plot.
- 3 Because she realized that Pat is the kind of girl who falls for bad men.
- 4 To get revenge on Rex by taking his money – her father was Mr MacKenzie.
- 5 She organizes burglaries on houses she has worked in.
- 6 She blackmails her because she knows she is Ruby MacKenzie.
- 7 To go back to Ireland and enjoy her horses and dogs.
- 8 Through a letter Gladys wrote to Miss Marple.

5 Speaking

Answers will vary.

6 Writing

Answers will vary.