

Appointment with Death

Agatha Christie

SUMMARIES

Part 1: Chapters 1–9

Poirot is on holiday in Jerusalem when he overhears two people apparently planning a murder. Carol and Raymond Boynton are talking about their stepmother.

Then we meet Dr Gerard and Dr Sarah King. When she sees the cruel way Mrs Boynton controls her children, especially the son Raymond, Sarah decides to help. Dr Gerard realizes the family hates Mrs Boynton. Mr Cope, a friend of the Boyntons, tells him Mrs Boynton inherited all the money from her dead husband.

Carol goes to Sarah's room and tells her that all the family feel trapped by their stepmother. When Carol returns to her room, Mrs Boynton is waiting angrily for her.

Mrs Boynton's daughter-in-law, Nadine, can no longer stand her controlling behaviour, so when she sees her husband, Lennox, she tells him they must move away from the Boynton home or Nadine will leave him and go to live with Mr Cope.

Sarah is angered by what she has heard about Mrs Boynton's influence over the family. She sees Mrs Boynton and tells her that she is pathetic. But Mrs Boynton's reply is strange and disturbing.

Part 2: Chapters 10–12

Sarah is travelling by car to Petra with Lady Westholme – who met her rich husband on a ship coming back from America – her friend Miss Pierce, and Dr Gerard. After a long journey, Sarah is shocked to see Mrs Boynton in their camp at Petra, but happy to meet Raymond again. He even tells her that he loves her!

The next morning, Mrs Boynton surprises her family by allowing them to go walking with the others without her. Only the youngest daughter, Ginevra, is not allowed to go: she must stay in her tent. They are all enjoying a walk together, when Dr Gerard becomes sick with malaria. He returns to the camp, leaving Sarah and Raymond together. Raymond tells Sarah he must return to the camp alone, and do something brave.

Later, when everyone is waiting for dinner, one of the servants finds that Mrs Boynton cannot move. Sarah goes to see her, but Mrs Boynton is already dead.

Part 3: Chapters 13–25

Colonel Carbury is suspicious and asks Poirot to investigate the death. Dr Gerard tells Poirot that when he was sick, he could not find his syringe, but the next day it appeared again. During the afternoon she died, several people said they talked to Mrs Boynton, but Sarah said she had been dead for several hours. Dr Gerard also found a small syringe mark on Mrs Boynton's wrist, and discovered that some digitalin – a drug that can cause heart attacks – was missing.

Poirot interviews everyone in turn. Lady Westholme and Miss Pierce say Mrs Boynton was rude to them on the afternoon that she died. Lady Westholme describes a local servant who made Mrs Boynton angry. Poirot talks to Lennox, then Nadine, who says that it is better that Mrs Boynton is dead. Poirot also interviews Carol and Raymond Boynton, and Mahmoud the local guide.

Poirot and Dr Gerard see Ginevra, who tells them about somebody who came into her tent. Sarah tells Poirot about the strange words Mrs Boynton said to her at the hotel in Jerusalem.

Away from the others, Nadine tells Lennox that she still loves him, and wants to stay with him, now that they are free from Mrs Boynton.

Part 4: Chapter 26–Epilogue

Poirot explains the evidence against each member of the family in turn. When he reaches Nadine, Lennox tries to protect his wife by saying that *he* killed Mrs Boynton. But Poirot proves that they are actually all innocent, as are Mr Cope, Sarah and Dr Gerard.

Poirot thinks Mrs Boynton's strange words to Sarah in the hotel are very important. He believes Mrs Boynton was actually speaking to somebody else, standing *behind* Sarah. On her last afternoon she let her family go for a walk so she could speak to this new person, alone. Poirot believes Lady Westholme lied about the Bedouin servant visiting Mrs Boynton, because she was too far away to see clearly. Miss Pierce believes anything her friend tells her, so *her* evidence is probably wrong. Poirot thinks that Lady Westholme dressed up as a Bedouin servant, went into Ginevra's tent by mistake, then took the syringe from Dr Gerard's tent before injecting Mrs Boynton with the poison. She returned to Miss Pierce and pretended to shout goodbye to Mrs Boynton. That night she put the syringe back in Dr Gerard's tent. Poirot thinks he knows her motive: Mrs Boynton recognized Lady Westholme from the prison where she worked. Mrs Boynton wanted to use the information to control Lady Westholme.

Suddenly they hear the sound of a gun-shot from Lady Westholme's room...

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 1 (Chapters 1–9)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Tell students that the most dramatic part of this book, a murder, happens in a real place called Petra – show students the map in the Culture notes. Ask if any of the students know the place. Ask students to think of three places they really want to visit, then to mill around the class and try to find someone who has visited some of these places, and talk about their experiences and what advice they can give.

Follow-up activity

A poem written by Henry John Rose Burgon described Petra as ‘A rose-red city—half as old as time!’. Ask the students why they think the author chose to set the murder here. (Answers could include: the dramatic scenery and history, the romance of the area in the British imagination, the author’s familiarity with the Middle East from visiting with her archaeologist husband.) In small groups, let students pick their own top 5 places to set a murder mystery, and explain why.

2 Speaking

Poirot overhears two characters say ‘Perhaps we are crazy ... After all, we are calmly planning to kill our own mother!’ Have any of the students watched soap operas, movies or TV dramas or read novels that are about family problems? In groups, let students swap story-lines from soap operas or movies (or novels, etc.) they know. Which problems make the most exciting stories? Can any of these things happen in real life?

After reading

3 Playing detective

Ask students to make notes about Sarah’s character and background in Chapter 2. Put these into a grid:

	looks	personality	background
Sarah			

Have students expand this grid with the following information about Nadine and Mr Cope:

<p>Mr Cope: pleasant / middle-aged / ordinary-looking / American / with a long, clean-shaven face / dressed very neatly / friendly, and liked to talk / loves and respects Nadine very much / old friend of Nadine’s</p>	<p>Nadine: unhappy / trained to be a nurse / quiet / dark hair / young / married to Lennox / not afraid of Mrs Boynton / a poor relative of Elmer Boynton</p>
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4 Comprehension

Ask students to draw the Boynton family tree using the information Mr Cope gives Dr Gerard in Chapter 5. You might want to use your own immediate family tree to help students. Make sure you include (d.) for ‘deceased/dead’ and ‘=’ for marriage.

5 Discussion

Divide the students into groups of 3 or 4 people and ask them to discuss why they think Mrs Boynton does the following things in Chapters 8 and 9.

- 1 Mrs Boynton asks Raymond to go and get a magazine for her off the table by Sarah (p. 19)
- 2 To Nadine, she says about Mr Cope ‘We must see him more often. Would you like that?’ (p. 19)
- 3 She sends Nadine to go and get her heart medicine (p. 19)
- 4 We learn that she invited Nadine to stay and helped her and Lennox get married (p. 21)

Now divide them into new groups, so that each member is reporting back from a different group. Let them explain and compare their theories.

6 Language

Use some of the jobs mentioned in the first part of the story to expand vocabulary. Check that students know the meaning of all of these: **archaeologist, Member of Parliament (‘an MP’), detective, nurse, waiter, travel agency (elicit travel agent)**. Put the students into groups. Give each group 5 minutes to brainstorm as many words connected with each of these jobs as they can. Tell them they will get points for every word: 1 point for ‘easy’ words, 2 points for more ‘difficult’ words. Students write the words on the board. Have students come to the board and score the words (each group scores a different group’s words: You can act as arbiter and explain any unknown words). At the end you can highlight any particularly useful usages.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 2 (Chapters 10–12)

Before reading

1 Research

Divide students into groups of three (students can double up on topics if this number is inconvenient) and assign them each 10 minutes to look and make notes about a topic in the Cultural notes in the reader: **Palestine and Trans-Jordan, Sights on the journey to Petra** and **Petra**. At the end of 10 minutes, they should present in their own words what they have learnt. If students have any personal experience or knowledge, they should include it in their presentation. If time, interest and resources allow, this could be expanded to more formal presentations with researched images, etc.

2 Speaking

Ask students to plan a short journey through their country, rather like Sarah's. Students should consider what sights to see, and why, and the logistics of travel (how long it takes, the best way to travel, etc.). Students then present either to the class or within groups.

3 Guess

We have now met all of the major characters (some of them only very briefly). Tell the students that someone will die in the next part of the story. Have them guess (a) who it will be, and (b) which character(s) is/are the most 'suspicious'. Put the names on the board and let students discuss their ideas, first in pairs, then share with the class. Students could vote on the most likely victim and suspects.

Sarah	Dr Gerard	Mr Cope	Mrs Boynton	Lennox
Nadine	Raymond	Carol	Ginevra	someone else (who?)

After reading

4 Listening

In Chapter 10 we get to know Lady Westholme and Miss Amabel Pierce better. Ask students to listen to the audio track for Chapter 10 and make notes about these two characters. Have them compare notes with their partner at the end. Do they want to include these two characters in the list of suspects / victims above?

5 Language

Chapter 10 contains a lot of useful words for describing personality. Write the following on strips of paper:

organized	efficient	vague	indecisive	masterful
clever	unbearable	controlling	respected	

Have the class suggest opposites for each word.

Write suggestions on the board, correct and explain any unfamiliar words, and feed in new vocabulary as appropriate.

Next, pick an adjective but don't say which one; instead, say the name of someone famous who represents that description (e.g. 'Albert Einstein' – 'clever'). Students have to guess which adjective you are thinking of. Now give each student or pair of students an adjective, so the others can't see. The students think of a famous person to embody this adjective, and write it on the board (in monolingual groups, it is acceptable to write the names in the local language to encourage more spontaneous, lively ideas). In groups, let the students try to decide who embodies which adjective. Finally check the answers as a class.

6 Playing detective

Ask the students in groups to answer these questions. What does ...

- 1 ...Sarah realize as she approaches the camp at Petra?
- 2 ...Raymond tell Sarah?
- 3 ...Mr Cope find out about Mrs Boynton?
- 4 ...Mrs Boynton say that surprises her family?
- 5 ...Miss Pierce think about Mrs Boynton after lunch?
- 6 ...Dr Gerard have to do suddenly during the walk?
- 7 ...Raymond have to do suddenly during the afternoon walk?
- 8 ...Sarah discover when the guide takes her to help Mrs Boynton?

Does this information help to us to understand Mrs Boynton's death? Elicit ideas and discuss possible theories with the class.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 3 (Chapters 13–25)

Before reading

1 Speaking

'I was thinking about the Place of Sacrifice,' Sarah replied. 'Sometimes people should be sacrificed – death isn't always as important as we think it is.'
'If that's what you really think,' said Dr Gerard, 'you should not be a doctor. To us, death is always the enemy.' [from the end of Part 1]

Have students discuss in small groups. Who do they think is right? Suggest some particular *people* to discuss: Mrs Boynton, Adolf Hitler, or a criminal in the news. Then suggest some particular *circumstances*, such as painful terminal illness, or coma. This discussion could be turned into a more formal debate, with one side taking Sarah's point of view, and the other Dr Gerard's.

2 Comprehension

Read students this description and ask them to draw a map of the camp to help with their investigations.

Mrs Boynton's body was found at the mouth of her cave, opposite Miss Pierce's tent, and a little way along and up above on a higher ridge of rock. Below the ridge were some tents. Lennox Boynton and his wife Nadine were staying in the cave next to Mrs Boynton's. Below but more to the right – almost opposite the marquee – were the tents of Raymond, Carol and Ginevra. On the right of Ginevra's tent was Dr Gerard's, and next to his tent was Miss King's. Then there was a stream, and across that stream was the marquee and some other tents. Miss Pierce's tent was near the marquee on the right side and Lady Westholme's and Mr Cope's were on the left side of the marquee. The opening of their tents faced the ridge, although it was nearly two hundred yards away. [Compare with the map in the book when you've finished.]

3 Playing detective

Ask students to start a list of what people did on the afternoon of Mrs Boynton's death, showing the times. Dr Gerard's description to Poirot in Chapter 14 is a good place to begin.

After reading

4 Listening

Have students listen to Chapter 13, and answer the following questions.

- 1 Who is Captain Carbury?
- 2 Has Poirot ever encountered a murder case while on vacation before?
- 3 What does Captain Carbury think happened to Mrs Boynton?

- 4 What do we know about Mrs Boynton's health before she died?
- 5 Why do you think Poirot says 'very strange' when he hears the name Boynton?
- 6 Who gets the money when Mrs Boynton dies?

5 Comprehension

Match the times to the events (students should be able to use their notes from 3 to help them).

4.10	Mr Cope and others saw Mrs Boynton asleep.
4.15	Miss Pierce saw a servant arguing with Mrs Boynton.
4.30	Dr Gerard saw Mrs Boynton's body.
4.35	Raymond spoke to his mother.
5.10	Nadine spoke to Mrs Boynton.
5.40	Lennox spoke to his mother.
5.50	Carol spoke to Mrs Boynton.
6.30	Lady Westholme and Miss Pierce spoke to Mrs Boynton.
next day, 9.00	Sarah King looked at the body.

6 Playing detective

Put students into groups and ask them to explain the following discrepancies: what **might have** happened?

- 1 When Sarah examined the body at 6:30, she believed that Mrs Boynton had been dead for an hour or more, but Raymond said that she was still alive and well when he spoke to her 30 minutes earlier.
- 2 Miss Pierce says she remembers Poirot sneezing ... but he did not.
- 3 First Lennox says he can't remember what time he got back to the camp, but then he says he set his mother's watch, and that it was 4:35.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 4 (Chapter 26–Epilogue)

Before reading

1 Playing detective

Ask students to look at Poirot's list of important points for Colonel Carbury. Why did he choose these facts? Do they help *you* solve the case?

If students have kept a timetable of the afternoon of Mrs Boynton's death, let them compare it to Poirot's at the beginning of Chapter 28.

2 Speaking

At the end of Chapter 22, the very 'British' Colonel Carbury tells Poirot happily: *'I don't understand [your explanation] at all. And you mention the servants a few times – I hope one of them didn't kill Mrs Boynton. That wouldn't be fair!'* Ask the students: What does he mean by 'fair', do you think? Perhaps all countries have a 'national image of themselves'. Part of the old British image used to be 'fair play' – playing a game (and life in general) honestly, and by the rules was more important than winning. Ask students if they agree with this idea and if this idea fits with what Colonel Carbury said. Ask students about the national images of their countries. Compare them to how other countries see them. After this, Poirot says *'Incredible! The English never grow up!'* Ask students what they think he means.

Finally, have students read the last part of the story, but NOT the *Epilogue*.

After reading

3 Comprehension

Match the two parts of the sentences to make Poirot's explanation clear.

- 1 Mrs Boynton needed a new person to control **because**
- 2 Mrs Boynton's answer to Sarah did not make sense **because**
- 3 Mrs Boynton let her family go on the afternoon of her death **because**
- 4 Miss Pierce is not a good witness **because**
- 5 Lady Westholme could not have seen the servant's clothes **because**
- 6 Lady Westholme knew Mrs Boynton **because**

- a she had actually been speaking to someone behind Sarah.
- b she said she was too far away to see his face.
- c you can suggest ideas to her that she later says are true. She really thought she had heard Mrs Boynton grunt rudely.
- d she had been in an American prison before she married Lord Westholme.

- e she had been planning to speak to Lady Westholme.
- f travelling abroad had made her realize how unimportant she really was.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____

4 Speaking

In groups, look at Poirot's list of significant facts in Chapter 27. In small groups, students try to reconstruct Poirot's logic.

5 Listening

Listen to the epilogue and answer these questions.

- 1 How does the newspaper report explain Lady Westholme's death?
- 2 What things have changed in the Boynton family's lives? When they have finished, students compare their notes with their partner. Then discuss why the newspaper report changed the facts of Lady Westholme's death. Do students think the epilogue is a good way to end the book or would it have been better to finish with the sound of the gunshot from Lady Westholme's room? Why? If they were making a film version, how would they end the movie?

6 Writing

Divide students into groups of two or three. Poirot says that although Mr Cope seems innocent, *'In a detective story you would definitely be the obvious suspect!'* Now they have finished *Appointment with Death*, do students think this story follows Poirot's rule? How did Agatha Christie hide the murderer? In their groups, have students imagine and write an outline of a murder mystery set in this class. Who would be the victim? Who would be the murderer(s)? How would they keep the secret until the end?

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ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

Part 1 (Chapters 1–9)

1/2 Speaking

Answers will vary.

Follow-up activity

Answers will vary.

3 Playing detective

Suggested answers:

	looks	personality	background
Sarah	beautiful – black hair and red lips	doesn't like to be ignored / likes to be in charge	just qualified as a doctor / wants to visit Petra
Mr Cope	middle-aged/ordinary-looking / with a long, clean-shaven face / dressed very neatly	pleasant / friendly, and likes to talk	old friend of Nadine's / American / loves and respects Nadine very much
Nadine	dark hair / young	quiet / not afraid of Mrs Boynton / unhappy	trained to be a nurse / married to Lennox / a poor relative of Elmer Boynton

4 Comprehension

Suggested answer:

Nadine is married to Lennox; Ginevra is the daughter of Elmer and Mrs Boynton; the other children are the children of Elmer and his first wife.

5 Discussion

Answers will vary.

6 Language

Sample answer:

Archaeologist: dig, digging, ancient, artefacts, travel, history, Romans, Egypt

Part 2 (Chapters 10–12)

1 Research

Answers will vary.

2 Speaking

Answers will vary.

3 Guess

Answers will vary.

4 Listening

Answers will vary.

5 Language

Accept any suitable answers.

Suggested answers:

organized – disorganized
efficient – inefficient
vague – precise
indecisive – decisive
masterful – weak
clever – stupid
unbearable – bearable
controlling – relaxed
respected – disrespected

6 Playing detective

- Mrs Boynton is there.
- He loves her.
- She was kind to a young pregnant servant girl but suddenly sacked her just before the baby was born.
- They can go for a walk without her.
- Her face looks very red. Perhaps she has a bad heart.
- He has to go back to the camp as he is sick.
- He has to go back to the camp to 'prove his courage'.
- She is dead.

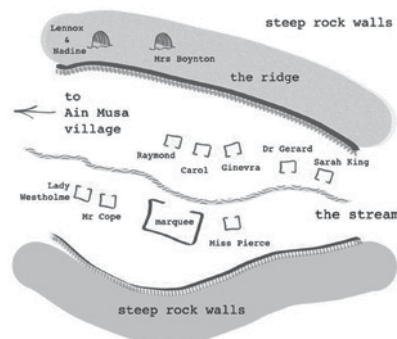
Part 3 (Chapters 13–25)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Comprehension

The Camp at Petra



3 Playing detective

Review the facts on pages 38–40 (Dr Gerard's explanation to Poirot).

4 Listening

- The man in charge of the area around Amman.

- Yes, a few times.
- Her family killed her.
- Her health is bad, and she was taking medicine for her heart.
- Because he met them in Jerusalem.
- The whole family equally.

5 Comprehension

16:10 – Miss Pierce saw a servant arguing with Mrs Boynton.
16:15 – Lady Westholme and Miss Pierce spoke to Mrs Boynton.
16:30 – Lennox spoke to his mother.
16:35 – Nadine spoke to Mrs Boynton.
17:10 – Carol spoke to Mrs Boynton.
17:40 – Mr Cope, Lady Westholme and Miss Pierce saw Mrs Boynton asleep.
17:50 – Raymond spoke to his mother.
18:30 – Sarah King looked at the body.
09:00 – Dr Gerard saw Mrs Boynton's body.

6 Playing detective

Suggested answers:

- Sarah might have made a mistake./Sarah might have killed Mrs Boynton.
- Miss Pierce might have a weak memory./Miss Pierce might have heard someone else sneeze.
- Lennox might be forgetful./Lennox might be lying to cover his tracks.

Part 4 (Chapter 26–Epilogue)

1 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

2 Speaking

Answers will vary.

3 Comprehension

- f** Mrs Boynton needed a new person to control **because** travelling abroad had made her realize how unimportant she really was.
- a** Mrs Boynton's answer to Sarah did not make sense **because** she had actually been speaking to someone behind Sarah.
- e** Mrs Boynton let her family go on the afternoon of her death **because** she had been planning to speak to Lady Westholme.
- c** Miss Pierce is not a good witness **because** you can suggest ideas to her that she later says are true. She really thought she had heard Mrs Boynton grunt rudely.
- b** Lady Westholme could not have seen the servant's clothes **because** she said she was too far away to see his face.
- d** Lady Westholme knew Mrs Boynton **because** she had been in an American prison before she married Lord Westholme.

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4 Speaking

Answers will vary.

5 Listening

- 1 The article says Lady Westholme shot herself by accident when she was cleaning her gun.
- 2 Sarah and Raymond are married; Ginevra is a happy, successful actress; Lennox and Nadine have children; Ginevra feels sorry for her mother. (You could remind students of the power of a Lord when this book was written, about the importance of social opinion and maintaining 'face', and attitudes to suicide.)

6 Writing

Answers will vary.