

SUMMARIES

Part 1: Chapters 1–4

Charles and Sophia meet in Egypt and fall in love. They cannot be together because of the war, but they agree to marry when the war is finished. Two years later they meet again in London. Charles hears that Sophia's grandfather, Aristide, has been murdered. Sophia tells Charles she cannot marry him until her grandfather's death is explained: she is afraid that there is something ruthless in the character of someone in her family. She is worried that the scandal of the murder could hurt Charles' career.

Charles' father is working for the London police, and wants Charles to help with the investigations. Since the war, the family has lived together in different parts of Aristide's house. Everyone suspects his young wife killed the old man by injecting him with his eyedrop medicine. Charles goes to the house, to investigate.

Part 2: Chapters 5–11

Sophia's aunt, Miss de Haviland, confirms that all of the family will get more money now that Aristide is dead, but that they all knew that Aristide was happy to give them money if they needed it when he was alive. Sophia's mother, Magda, is very dramatic, and her father, Philip, is very quiet and unemotional. Roger, Aristide's other son, is much more emotional. His wife, Clemency, is intelligent, and always protects her husband. Laurence, the teacher, seems very weak and scared. Brenda, Aristide's young wife, explains that Aristide married her to help her when she thought she was having a baby. When she discovered later that she was not pregnant, Aristide's family thought that Brenda was trying to trick Aristide, but it seems that Aristide himself did not care. The family thinks that Brenda is having an affair with Laurence, but she denies it. Sophia thinks Brenda is very good at controlling men. Sophia's younger sister, Josephine, is very proud that she knows a lot about other people's secrets, which she writes in a black notebook.

Aristide told his family that they would all inherit the money equally, and the family saw the witnesses sign the will to make it legal. When the lawyer finds the same will, however, he discovers that it has not been signed. The police discover that the family business, that Aristide gave his son Roger, is about to go bankrupt. They suspect Roger killed his father to get the money, but Roger has proof that Aristide agreed to give him the money to save the company before he died. Roger just wants to move to another country with his wife and enjoy a peaceful life.

Part 3: Chapters 12–17

Charles' father tells Charles that murderers all want to talk and show how clever they are. Josephine is angry with Charles

because he used her information to help the police. She thinks the police are stupid. Charles is worried that someone might want to hurt Josephine because she knows too much.

Roger finally tells the family that his company is going to go bankrupt, but he does not want them to give him money to save it. He never enjoyed business and he just wants to be free. Miss de Haviland says that Philip has always been jealous that Aristide preferred Roger. She has spent all of her life looking after Aristide's children and grandchildren, but she surprises Charles when she tells him that although she loves them all, she does not love them more than is good for them. Magda decides to send Josephine to school in Switzerland.

The family lawyer receives Aristide's real will and a letter. Aristide wrote that there is only one person in the family with the intelligence, judgement and courage to look after the family: he has left all of the money to Sophia! Suddenly they hear news that Josephine has been badly hurt.

Part 4: Chapters 18–25

They discover Josephine's room is a mess, as if someone was looking for something. Charles remembers Josephine was in the attic. He goes there and finds love letters from Brenda to Laurence. The police arrest the couple, but Charles realizes that Aristide told Sophia he planned to leave her all the money – maybe she is the murderer!

Miss de Haviland tells Charles that she is very sick and will die soon. Charles still believes Josephine is in danger, when he hears that Nannie has drunk Josephine's cocoa... and died of poisoning! Josephine is very excited – she wants to tell the police who the murderer was, just like in a detective story... Miss de Haviland takes her out in the car for an ice cream, leaving some letters behind. When they are late home, Charles reads the letters. Miss de Haviland had discovered Josephine's notebook, and realized that she is the murderer. Josephine had hurt herself and made her room look a mess, so that no one would suspect her. Miss de Haviland believes that Josephine has a mental illness, and decides to protect her by killing both herself and Josephine in a car crash.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 1 (Chapters 1–4)

Before reading

1 Guess

A Write the four lines of the opening nursery rhyme on four pieces of paper and give them to the students in small groups. Explain the glossary words, then ask them to guess the order of the lines. If they are having problems, explain that it is a kind of poem and has a simple AABB rhyme scheme (use the words of a popular song or a common rhyme you know to explain ‘rhyme’ if necessary).

B Ask the students to speculate on what happens in the story – you can tell them that the story involves a rich family and a murder.

C Explain a little more about nursery rhymes (or refer students to the Cultural notes at the end of the book), and then have students talk about their own country’s version of nursery rhymes, and maybe translate one or two that they know, and explain what, if anything, they mean.

2 Research

Refer students to the Cultural notes: ask them to work in pairs to explain the following pairs.

Allies : Axis	British Government : Cairo	war : love
London : aeroplanes	suburbs : bombs	

3 Listening

Ask students to listen to Chapter 1 and decide which statements below are True or False. Tell them that the speaker is called Charles.

- 1 Charles and Sophia met in Egypt.
- 2 Charles asked Sophia to marry him just before he left for East Asia.
- 3 Sophia lives in a large house just outside London.
- 4 Sophia lives alone with her parents.
- 5 Her grandfather went to Greece because it was too dangerous to stay in London with the bombing.
- 6 Aristide, her grandfather, is extremely rich.

After reading

4 Speaking

Ask students to imagine they are in Charles and Sophia’s situation: what would they do? Would they wait for two years until they were both in the same country? Or would they get married as quickly as possible? Why? What do students think of ‘long-distance relationships’? Do any of the students have any experience (either personal or from friends)? What are the problems? What makes a successful relationship?

5 Writing

A Arrange the following words to make Charles’ telegram to Sophia, without referring to the book. Tell them the full stops are in the correct place, but they will have to add some capital letters. They can check their answers on page 4.

back arrived just. evening dine Mario’s this o’clock you Restaurant nine will.

B When you sent a telegram, you had to pay for every word, so people didn’t write unimportant words (words that can be guessed from the situation). Ask students to look at the two telegrams below, and see if they can decide which words can be missed out:

- 1 I’ve just seen the news of your grandfather’s death. I’m very sorry. Please let me know when I can see you.
- 2 I will be at Mario’s Restaurant at nine o’clock in the evening.

C The principle can be extended to taking notes. All the unimportant words can be missed out, but students need to keep enough words so that they can understand what they wrote a few months later! The teacher could practise this with students by assigning a short reading section (such as the sections in the Cultural notes on the **Deaths column in newspapers** and **Bankruptcy**) to a student. Ask them to take very brief notes in English, then swap with another student who has read a different section, and see if the other student can understand the notes.

6 Playing detective

Sophia talks about a ‘ruthless’ nature in her family. Match the people to Sophia’s descriptions. Who does she say could be ruthless enough to kill someone?

Who	Characteristics	Ruthless?
Brenda Laurence	an actress too controlled	has a bad temper only thinks of things that affect her
Sophia’s mother	a young teacher	hardly shows emotion
Clemency Uncle	lovable and kind	capable of murder for something important
Roger	Aristide’s second wife	likes her easy life, and would not take risks
Sophia’s father	a scientist	cold and unemotional
Sophia	does not like Brenda	no courage

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 2 (Chapters 5–11)

Before reading

1 Speaking

A Put students into pairs, and ask each in turn to describe how their house or apartment building looks from the outside. The partner uses the information to make a sketch, and can ask questions. They then swap roles.

B Ask students to describe what they think a 'traditional English house' looks like. This could be done in small groups: give each group 10 minutes to discuss and make a sketch. Compare ideas. Gather together some pictures of English houses (either from magazines or from an internet search). Show them to students and ask them to decide which one they think is closest to Aristide's house, and why. Feed in new vocabulary as necessary. Point out the difference in counting floors: ground (or 'bottom floor' in Chapter 6), first, second in the UK vs. first, second, etc. in the US.

C Discuss the differences between English houses and houses in students' home countries. Which features do students like and dislike about each kind? Have students describe their ideal house to their partners, and explain their choices. This final section could be made into a writing assignment, practising hypotheticals, spatial descriptions, and explanations.

2 Listening

Show students the following questions, then have them listen to Chapter 5 to find the answers.

- 1 What is the connection between Charles and Edith de Haviland?
- 2 Did Edith de Haviland like Aristide?
- 3 How long has Miss de Haviland lived at *Three Gables*?
- 4 What does Philip Leonides do?
- 5 What does Roger do?
- 6 What does Aristide's family gain from his death?
- 7 Who does Edith de Haviland think the poisoner is?
- 8 What makes Charles wonder if Edith killed Aristide?

After reading

3 Comprehension

Who ...?

- 1 has dark hair and bright blue eyes, a small chin and a straight nose, and looks very English.
- 2 is about 70, with lots of untidy grey hair and sharp, intelligent-looking eyes.
- 3 is tall, about fifty years old and very handsome, with a perfect-looking face, with a straight nose and fair hair that was just beginning to turn grey.
- 4 is very emotional, and has big blue eyes and lots of red hair, wearing a luxurious, pink dressing gown.

5 is a fair-haired sensitive young man of about thirty.

6 is calm and quiet, with red hair in an old-fashioned style, wearing a neat grey coat and skirt and a pale shirt.

7 is a tall, clumsy, emotional man, with strong shoulders, dark hair, and an ugly but pleasant face.

8 is about fifty, with short grey hair, grey eyes, an intelligent and sensitive face, and a strong personality.

4 Playing detective

There are some odd facts in this case. Ask students to discuss possible answers to these clues.

- p. 19 Why was it strange that there were no fingerprints on the eyedrop bottle that contained the eserine poison?
- If someone in the family (Brenda, Roger or Clemency) murdered Aristide, why didn't they wash the insulin bottle or throw it away?
- p. 41 The whole family heard Aristide explain his will, and saw two servants sign their names on it. Why are there no names written on the will when Inspector Taverner looks at it? The lawyer, Mr Gaitskill, is sure it is not a copy, and there are no signs that the signatures were erased.
- At the end of Chapter 11, Charles says 'We were looking at the problem from the wrong way round.' What does he mean?

5 Comprehension

When Josephine first meets Charles, she tells him lots of secrets. Who is she talking about?

- 1 With the money from Aristide's will, he can buy a house in London. Before, he didn't have enough money because he lost lots on plays.
 - 2 He stopped Josephine learning ballet dancing.
 - 3 They were going to go abroad together without telling anyone.
 - 4 He stole some money from his business in London.
 - 5 They argued on the day of the murder.
 - 6 They are in love and wrote sappy love letters to each other.
 - 7 He was too frightened to fight in the last war.
- How many of these 'secrets' do you believe? When you have read more, come back and check how many things Josephine really knew.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 3 (Chapters 12–17)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Write 'Aristide Leonides' on the board. Then elicit the names of all the possible suspects and write them in a list underneath. Put students into small groups to discuss the motives and alibis of each person on the list. Return to a whole class discussion, and let students summarize the discussions in notes on the board in three columns: name – motive – alibi. Finally, ask them to vote on who they think is the most likely murderer.

2 Listening

Listen to Chapter 12 and complete this small talk by Charles' father on 'How to Spot a Murderer'.

Some murderers are very nice, _____¹ people who want something so much that they _____². They don't think about what happens next. Although they _____³ that murder is wrong, they don't _____⁴. They think that it wasn't _____⁵ or that their victim _____⁶ – and they're never really sorry for what they did. The one thing that all murderers have _____⁷ is that they are all vain. They are frightened of being caught, but they still want to _____⁸ about how clever they are. And murderers want to talk because they're very _____⁹. They can't tell anyone about what they did or how clever they are – and they will never be able to tell. So they like talking about the murder. And if the murderer talks, he or she _____¹⁰ and say too much.

After reading

3 Comprehension

The family meets to talk about Roger's business affairs. Match the people to their behaviour and what they said. The first one has been done for you.

who	how they behaved	what they said
Philip	she arranged the meeting: she likes dramatic scenes	doesn't want to take money from the children for Roger
Roger	pale and annoyed	<u>jealous of Roger, and doesn't want to give him money</u>
Clemency	calm and cool, polite to Charles	she is glad that Roger is free to do what he wants now
Edith	<u>cold and serious</u>	he doesn't want any money; he blames himself
Magda	unhappy, then angry	he thinks it's too late to save the company
Eustace	knitting	she wants to give Roger money to save the company

This would make a good dramatic scene to act out in class in groups of 6–8.

4 Speaking

The story of a family arguing among themselves is a popular one in TV dramas or 'soap operas'. Ask the students if they ever watch this kind of drama. In small groups, give them the following questions to discuss: • What soap operas are popular in their countries? • What are they about? • Ask them to describe the main characters. • Ask them to share an interesting (or ridiculous!) story-line. • Why do they think soap operas are so popular? • Why do/don't they enjoy watching them? • What things would they change to make this a modern soap opera story? • If this was a soap opera, what would happen next?

5 Speaking

Give each student one of the prompt cards below. Divide the students into pairs, each pair has the same prompt card. They practise together, using the notes on the prompt card to make fluent explanations. Then make new pairs, each partner has a different prompt card. They take turns to explain their part of Aristide's plan to each other.

every family / one strong character / take care of the family / Roger – poor judgement / Philip – unsure of himself, hiding from life / Eustace – too young and not enough self-control / Sophia – intelligence, good judgement, courage / fair and generous / look after everyone in the family	Aristide thought / best not to tell family / leave everything to Sophia / asked Mr Gaitskill, the family lawyer / prepare a will / read it out to his family / put both wills on the table / cover them with a piece of paper / when the servants sign the will / Aristide move the paper / sign the real will
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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 4 (Chapters 18–25)

Before reading

1 Speaking

In Chapter 15, Sophia tells Charles: *‘I was happy in Cairo when I could forget about [my family.] We’re all too fond of each other and we all live too closely together – all together in a little crooked house. We haven’t grown up separately and become independent.’*

Ask students to look at the Leonides family tree on p. vi, and discuss who likes who, who is jealous of who, etc. Who is most likely to have murdered another family member?

More generally, ask if a family can be **too** close? How can people keep family relationships happy? Explain the expression *‘give and take / need some give and take’*, and encourage its use in a discussion about the responsibilities of parents towards their children, and vice versa, in the students’ countries. Is the situation changing? Why? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these changes? What do the students do to keep the balance in their own families? If students are living away from their families, what is the effect of this on their feelings towards their family?

2 Guess

A Ask students who says *‘I think it’s time for the next murder, don’t you?’* at the end of Chapter 16.

B Then write the following keywords on the board and ask students to explain how they relate to Josephine in the story – students can add notes on the board.

*embezzled sneak and spy ballet dancing little black notebook
soppy love letters twenty-one years old show off
Switzerland stupid*

C In Chapter 16, just before Josephine was knocked out, where did Charles see her? What had she been doing? There has been one murder and one attempted murder. This is the last chance for students to speculate on who the murderer might be – divide them into small groups to discuss this question and report back to the class on who they think the murderer(s) is (are), and what the motive might be. Don’t be too serious: encourage imaginative suggestions!

3 Playing detective

When Agatha Christie writes something like *‘...but I did not understand it’*, it usually signals a clue! Ask students to discuss what Edith de Haviland’s remark on p. 58 might mean: *‘Yes, I really love them. But not too much.’* On hearing this, Charles says: *‘I had the feeling that her last remark was important – but I did not understand it.’* What do students think will happen in the last part of the story. Why?

After reading

4 Speaking

Who says the following things? Ask students to match the names to the words, then put students into pairs and assign each pair a speech. Give them five minutes to work out the answer, then split the pairs into two new groups. They have to explain what the speaker really meant to their new group.

- 1 ‘I think the facts point clearly in one direction,...I’m surprised you don’t see it yourself. I think –’
- 2 ‘I might not want to tell. I might – be fond of the person.’
- 3 ‘I must quickly write a few letters.’
- 4 ‘Where are Edith and Josephine? They’re out very late.’
- 5 ‘Goodbye, dear... Don’t worry too much. Some things just have to be accepted.’
- 6 ‘Yes...I thought it was. Poor child...’

5 Comprehension

Write the following sentences on pieces of paper. Give them to individual students. They have to arrange themselves in a line in the order the event on their paper happened. (If the class is large, you could make two groups, and they could race each other. You could vary the numbers by fixing the first and/or last event.)

- **a** Edith came to *Three Gables* to look after Roger, Philip, and their brothers and sisters.
- **b** She pretends to be taking Josephine out for an ice cream.
- **c** She writes a letter to Charles explaining the real reason, and giving him Josephine’s notebook.
- **d** She wants to protect Josephine from herself, and from a life as a murderer.
- **e** Edith de Haviland’s sister – Aristide’s first wife – died.
- **f** Edith only has a short time to live, so she decides to kill herself and Josephine.
- **g** When Sophia, Eustace and Josephine were born, she looked after them, too.
- **h** She writes a note to the police taking responsibility for the murders.
- **i** Edith finds Josephine’s notebook in the garden and realizes Josephine is the murderer.
- **j** She suspects Josephine might be the murderer, maybe quite early.

When the students are clear about the order of events, discuss some of the details with them:

- i** When did Edith de Haviland first suspect that Josephine could be the killer? Why?
- ii** Why is it important that Edith only has a few months to live?
- iii** Why do you think Josephine became a murderer?
- iv** Do you agree with what Edith did? Why?

ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

Part 1 (Chapters 1–4)

1 Guess

Answers will vary.

2 Research

Suggested answers:

- The Allies (UK, the Soviet Union, the USA, China, etc.) were fighting the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan, etc.)
- The British Government was fighting the Axis powers to keep control of North Africa.
- During World War 2, many people who fell in love were forced to spend a lot of time away from each other, fighting or working, like Charles and Sophia.
- Because London was the centre of British power, the Allies attacked it heavily with bombs. Many people left the city to live in safer places, if they could, including the Leonides family.
- The suburbs around London were much safer than the centre of London, so many Londoners, such as the Leonides, went to live with friends or family there to escape the bombing.

3 Listening

- 1 True
- 2 False. He told her he would ask her to marry him in a few years when he got back to England.
- 3 True
- 4 False. She lives with a brother, one sister, a mother, a father, an uncle, an aunt by marriage, a grandfather, a great-aunt and a step-grandmother.
- 5 False. He came from Greece, and his family went to stay with him in the suburbs because it was safe from the bombing there.
- 6 True

4 Speaking

Answers will vary.

5 Writing

A The answer is the first telegram on page 4.

B The answers are the telegrams on pages 4 and 5.

Other answers will vary.

6 Playing detective

- Brenda Aristide's second wife likes her easy life, and would not take risks no
- Laurence a young teacher no courage no
- Sophia's mother an actress only thinks of things that affect her yes
- Clemency a scientist cold and unemotional yes

- Uncle Roger lovable and kind has a bad temper yes
- Sophia's father too controlled hardly shows emotion yes
- Sophia does not like Brenda capable of murder for something important yes

Part 2 (Chapters 5–11)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Listening

- 1 She knew Charles' father when he was a boy.
- 2 No. (But she seems to miss him now: she says the house seems very empty without him.)
- 3 Over forty years.
- 4 He writes unsuccessful history books.
- 5 He is in charge of Aristide's biggest company, Associated Foods.
- 6 They would all get even more money.
- 7 She doesn't tell Charles. She only says that the police will probably suspect Brenda.
- 8 She looked so ruthless when she attacked the weeds growing in the garden.

3 Comprehension

- 1 Sophia
- 2 Edith de Haviland
- 3 Philip Leonides
- 4 Magda
- 5 Laurence Brown
- 6 Magda
- 7 Roger
- 8 Clemency

4 Playing detective

- p. 19 (suggested answer) Aristide used the eyedrops regularly, so it should have his fingerprints. Maybe someone wiped the bottle clean – which means the murder was planned.

Other answers will vary.

5 Comprehension

- 1 Philip
- 2 Aristide
- 3 Roger and Clemency
- 4 Roger
- 5 Roger and Aristide
- 6 Brenda and Laurence
- 7 Laurence

Part 3 (Chapters 12–17)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Listening

Some murderers are very nice, ordinary¹ people who want something so much that they kill for it². They don't think about what happens next. Although they know³ that murder is wrong, they don't feel that it's wrong⁴. They think that it wasn't their fault⁵ or that their victim deserved it⁶ – and they're never really sorry for what they did.

The one thing that all murderers have in common⁷ is that they are all vain. They are frightened of being caught, but they still want to show off⁸ about how clever they are. And murderers want to talk because they're very lonely⁹. They can't tell anyone about what they did or how clever they are – and they will never be able to tell. So they like talking about the murder. And if the murderer talks, he or she might make a mistake¹⁰ and say too much.

3 Comprehension

who – how they behaved – what they said

- Roger – pale and annoyed – he doesn't want any money; he blames himself
- Clemency – calm and cool, polite to Charles – she is glad that Roger is free to do what he wants now
- Edith – knitting – she wants to give Roger money to save the company
- Magda – she arranged the meeting; she likes dramatic scenes – she doesn't want to take money from the children to give to Roger
- Eustace – unhappy, then angry – he thinks it's too late to save the company

4 Speaking

Answers will vary.

5 Speaking

Answers will vary.

Part 4 (Chapters 18–25)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Guess

Suggested answers:

A Josephine

B

embezzled – she thought Roger was stealing money from his company

sneak and spy – she likes to sneak and spy on people

ballet dancing – Aristide stopped her learning ballet dancing

little black notebook – where she writes her 'evidence'

sappy love letters – she says she has seen letters that Brenda and Laurence wrote to each other

twenty-one years old – when she would receive the money from Aristide's will

Crooked House

Agatha Christie

show off – she likes to show off how much she knows

Switzerland – Magda wants to send Josephine to school there

stupid – she thinks the police are stupid

C

She was coming down from the attic. She had been playing detective.

Other answers will vary.

3 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

4 Speaking

- 1 Charles' father. He must have guessed it was Josephine.
- 2 Josephine – she is talking about herself!
- 3 Edith de Haviland. She has planned the suicide and needs to write the note to the police and to Charles.
- 4 Magda asks this, but they are already dead.
- 5 Edith de Haviland. She is trying to explain to Sophia.
- 6 Charles' father. He is sad that an innocent child could become a murderer. Or do you think he means something else? What does your group think?

5 Comprehension

- 1 e Edith de Haviland's sister – Aristide's first wife – died.
- 2 a Edith came to *Three Gables* to look after Roger, Philip, and their brothers and sisters.
- 3 g When Sophia, Eustace and Josephine were born, she looked after them, too.
- 4 j She suspects Josephine might be the murderer, maybe quite early.
- 5 i Edith finds Josephine's notebook in the garden and realizes Josephine is the murderer.
- 6 d She wants to protect Josephine from herself, and from a life as a murderer.
- 7 f Edith only has a short time to live, so she decides to kill herself and Josephine.
- 8 h She writes a note to the police taking responsibility for the murders.
- 9 c She writes a letter to Charles explaining the real reason, and giving him Josephine's notebook.
- 10 b She pretends to be taking Josephine out for an ice cream.

Suggested answers:

- i Maybe before she said 'I love them dearly. But not too much.' Chapter 14, p. 58.
- ii Because she was afraid that no one else would be able to protect Josephine after she died. Or because she did not have much life left to lose?
- iii Sophia talks about the whole family being 'ruthless' in different ways. Nannie says Magda sometimes ignored her, said she was ugly, (p. 72) and that it had a bad effect on her.
- iv *Answers will vary.*