

SUMMARIES

Part 1: Chapters 1–4

Several top scientists around the world have disappeared. The latest, Thomas Betterton, was working in America before World War II, and discovered ZE Fission – one of the most important discoveries in nuclear science.

Mr Jessop and Colonel Wharton try to find him. They don't know whether the scientists disappear willingly or if they are taken. They interview his wife, Olive, but can't get any useful information. She seems devastated by Tom's disappearance, but Jessop suspects she is planning to join him when she mentions a trip to Morocco.

Boris Glydr – a Polish relation of Betterton's first wife, Elsa – asks Jessop for news.

Hilary Craven is a young English woman, whose daughter has died and whose husband has left her for another woman. She leaves England for Morocco, to escape her sadness. Because of fog, she takes a different plane to the one she would have been on – and misses a serious plane crash. This makes her realize she wants to die, so she tries to commit suicide. But Jessop – who followed Olive Betterton to Morocco – notices how similar she looks to Betterton's wife. Olive was on the original plane – she is injured and will die soon. Jessop makes Hilary an offer – to work undercover and find Betterton. Hilary agrees. They visit Olive in the hospital and spend time with her before she dies. Olive says a rhyme about snow, and warns Hilary about danger and a man called Boris.

After Olive's death, Hilary learns everything she can about her new character.

Part 2: Chapters 5–10

Hilary, disguised as Olive, returns to her hotel to start her new life. She meets two women, an English tourist, Miss Hetherington, and an American, Mrs Baker.

Hilary tries to discover what travel plans Olive had made, and receives information about her new tickets – someone has booked this for her. She takes the train to Fez, and meets a Frenchman, Henri Laurier. He talks to her about snow, but she doesn't understand.

Miss Hetherington and Mrs Baker are also at the hotel in Fez, and so is a very rich businessman, Mr Aristides.

While sightseeing, she is taken to a secret location, and meets Laurier. This time she remembers Olive's rhyme about snow, and this 'proves' her identity. The journey on which Olive had planned to join Tom is going ahead.

Hilary follows her instructions to leave for Marrakesh. Mrs Baker joins her.

At the airport, they board a small plane with four other passengers – scientists from different parts of the world. She is surprised when the plane lands suddenly in the desert, then realizes that the whole thing has been arranged to look like

an accident. The other passengers are part of the plan to disappear in secret. They are leaving their countries to follow ideals of freedom.

The group travels through the desert. Hilary tries to leave signs for Jessop. She befriends an American, Andy Peters. Eventually they reach a hospital, which is a leper colony.

Part 3: Chapters 11–16

Hilary worries that Tom won't recognize her, and this will prove she is an impostor. She decides to pretend she doesn't recognize him – but Tom plays along. He has had plastic surgery, so isn't surprised that she doesn't recognize him.

Hilary discovers that he is terrified of the Unit, as the hospital is known, and wants to escape. The Unit is full of scientists from all over the world who have come to work in the most modern facilities without political pressures. But the place is like a prison, having no contact with the outside world, and with an ideology which brainwashes those inside. Hilary is questioned when she arrives, and given a new wardrobe, so she has everything she needs.

Tom and Hilary explain their stories to each other, and Hilary has to tell him about Olive's death. He is struggling to work inside the Unit. Meanwhile, Jessop interviews Miss Hetherington, who was working undercover to follow Hilary for Jessop. They know about the plane crash, and realize all the passengers were scientists. Then a pearl from Hilary's necklace is found – a clue! They follow more of these to find out where she is.

Hilary's life in the Unit is like a dream. The other scientists scare her, and seem to be living in another world. They listen to the Director of the Unit describe his vision for the future.

Part 4: Chapters 17–22

Jessop and his colleagues get closer to Hilary. At the Unit, Peters finds people who can help him escape. He tells Hilary about his cousin. She was a brilliant scientist, but she has died.

Visitors come to the Unit, so everyone is moved to the Emergency area. Then Hilary is called to meet 'the Master' – Mr Aristides. He says he created this place to keep the best scientific brains, so he can sell them later. He admires Hilary's courage, but wants her to stay in his prison.

Jessop and Leblanc find the hospital and arrange a visit, accompanied by important people of many nationalities. When they have evidence, they make their accusations and the plan is revealed.

Afterwards, Peters reveals that he has also been working undercover, to arrest Tom Betterton for the murder of his first wife Elsa, Peters' cousin. Andy Peters is the Polish cousin who first met Jessop in Chapter 1. He and Hilary fall in love.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 1 (Chapters 1–4)

Before reading

1 Research

Talk about the era this book was written in with the class. Explain that World War II had ended, but the major powers in the world – America and Russia – were engaged in ‘the Cold War’. Refer them to the Cultural notes for information about this period in history. If the class is interested in history, they can do more research online or in reference books.

The background feeling at this time informs the actions in the book, so it is useful to establish at the outset what this is. Focus on the phrase ‘Was Betterton thoroughly investigated before he arrived in England?’ on page 2. Ask for ideas about what this tells us of the attitude of political authorities to scientists.

2 Speaking

Another important part of this story is the nuclear energy debate, which of course is still relevant today. In the story, the character Tom Betterton is famous for the discovery of ‘ZE Fission’. This is a name used within the novel for the nuclear reaction which can be used as an energy source, but also to make atomic bombs. Again, you can refer the students to the Cultural notes for more information, and encourage them to do further research if they are interested.

Remind the class that atomic bombs were used in World War II with appalling consequences, and that at the time of the story, this was a recent event.

Divide the class into two groups – for and against. Set them the topic ‘In the modern world, nuclear power is a good source of energy’. Ask them to think of reasons to support the point of view they have been given, and have a class debate.

After reading

3 Comprehension

Answer the questions about the first chapter of *Destination Unknown*.

- 1 Where did Betterton work before the War?
- 2 Who is Elsa Mannheim?
- 3 When did Olive Betterton last see Tom?
- 4 What does Jessop think Tom has done?
- 5 Who visited Tom recently?
- 6 What letter does Olive show to Jessop?
- 7 What connection does Major Glydr have to Olive and Tom Betterton?
- 8 Why does Jessop decide to go abroad?

4 Playing detective

Encourage the students to keep notes on each character, and how they fit into the storyline. This will help them follow the

plot as it is revealed. Ask them to complete the character names. You can refer students to the Cultural notes for more information about ZE Fission and the Polish Resistance.

Tom Betterton	Colonel Wharton	Dr Mannheim	Mr Jessop
Hilary Craven	Elsa Mannheim	Olive Betterton	Major Glydr

Who...	escaped from Germany to America?	
	discovered ZE Fission?	
	doesn't understand nuclear science?	
	fought in the Polish Resistance?	
	thinks the security reports are useless?	
Whose...	plane takes a different course because of fog?	
	father was a famous scientist?	
	doctor tells her to have a holiday?	

5 Speaking

At the beginning of Chapter 3 we meet Hilary Craven – a young woman who is trying to leave personal tragedy behind her. Discuss with the class what her first plan is, and why this changes. What makes her decide to attempt to take her own life?

Clearly suicide is a difficult and sensitive subject, but students may have views about her course of action. If so, you could discuss with the class how she must be feeling, and whether she could take a different action in order to escape her pain.

When Jessop comes into her room, does he offer her something better or worse than what she currently has? Do they think she is right to accept his offer, or is it very dangerous? Why do they think she accepts it?

6 Guess

When Hilary and Jessop visit Olive in hospital, she gives them two pieces of information. Ask the students to identify these and to think about what they might mean. Olive says a rhyme ‘Snow, snow, beautiful snow, you slip on a lump, and over you go’. Is this a nonsensical line she says because she is close to death, or does it have a deeper meaning?

What else is Olive trying to talk about – is it a warning, or advice, and who is it for? Remind students to read the whole of Chapter 4 for more information about who Boris is.

Allow students to discuss their ideas in pairs, then ask for ideas around the class.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 2 (Chapters 5–10)

Before reading

1 Speaking

At the end of the previous section, Hilary learns everything she can about Olive's life. Ask the class to read the section again and list the information she has to learn (page 19). Ask them to work in pairs and think of any other information she might need to know.

Ask students to imagine that they had to take on someone else's identity. What would they have to do? Is it enough to look like another person, or would they have to change anything else?

Ask: *If you were Hilary, would you feel confident or scared at this point? Why?* Let students discuss their ideas in groups, then have a class discussion.

2 Playing detective

In Part 1, Jessop says of the missing scientists:

'... we want to know what's happened to them. Were all these scientists – there are lots of them – kidnapped, or did they go willingly? Where have they gone? Who arranged everything and what do they want? There are so many questions – and you can help us get some answers.'

Why do you think Jessop is so worried about these scientists? Does he really think they have been kidnapped, or is he more suspicious about their disappearance?

Ask students to think about the political climate of the time, referring them back to the Cultural notes for a reminder if necessary. Why would scientists disappear, and what might they be doing? Why is Jessop so keen to find them?

Ask students to think of five questions they would like to ask Tom Betterton about why he has disappeared.

Then ask students for their ideas about where he might be, and what he might be doing. Put students in pairs to role-play being Jessop and Tom. They should imagine that Jessop has found Tom, and Tom is describing where he has been.

Students can make a note of their ideas to come back to later in the story.

After reading

3 Comprehension

There are lots of new characters in this section. Ask students to read these imagined phrases and match them to the character who might say them.

- 1 I will help you get to your destination.
- 2 I'd like to go to Fez by plane, but it's too expensive.
- 3 You need to be strong for this journey – there is no place for weak people.
- 4 I have lots of money, but I want something more important in my life.

5 The benefits of science should be for everyone, not just one country.

6 Marrakesh – what a wonderful idea! I'll come with you.

7 I need to be left alone to work, without the interruptions of daily life.

8 Scientists are the most powerful people – they should be able to control what other people do.

a Mr Aristides

b Helga Needheim

c Torquil Ericsson

d Henri Laurier

e Dr Barron

f Mrs Baker

g Andrew Peters

h Miss Hetherington

Then ask students to write a brief description of each character, giving their name, where they are from, and what they look like, if possible. They should also try to describe their personality using the clues in the text. If time is short, this could be done in groups, with students dividing up the work between them to produce one final document.

4 Research

In this section, the phrase 'fellow-travellers' is introduced. Refer students to the Cultural notes section on **Fellow-travellers** to find out a potential meaning which Agatha Christie attached to this phrase. If students are interested, they can do further research online. Check they understand how the negative meaning developed.

You could briefly discuss how the American ideology had a deep mistrust of the Russian Communist system during the Cold War, so any reference to Communism is likely to be negative.

Then discuss the relevance of this idea to the story – what does it say about what the scientists are doing? Do they genuinely want to improve conditions for humanity, or do they want to increase their own power and dominance? Students can think about how the different characters are developing, and which ones seem to be balanced, and which ones more extreme.

5 Speaking

Remind students of the political climate in which this story is set, and refer them to the Cultural notes section on **Creating a 'better world'**. Ask them to think about this in relation to how the plot is developing. Where are the scientists going, and why? What are they planning to do? At this point in the story it isn't clear what their actual destination is, so discuss ideas around the class.

Ask students: *Was Jessop right to be worried about the missing scientists?* Discuss ideas as a class.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 3 (Chapters 11–16)

Before reading

1 Comprehension

Ask students to recap what happened in the previous section. Ensure they point out the key details, prompting them if necessary:

- four scientists, Hilary and Mrs Baker all board a plane
- the pilot fakes a plane crash
- they use other dead bodies to make it seem that everyone on the plane had died
- the group travels through the desert in disguise, finally reaching a hospital
- the hospital is a leper colony

Explain to students that at the time, a leper colony would have been a very remote place because people were scared of the disease. Ask: *Why do you think they have been taken to a leper colony?* Share ideas around the class.

2 Playing detective

Refer the students to this version of the map on page 107.

Map of Morocco and the region in 1954



Ask students to label the map with the places in the box. Then ask them to highlight the approximate route of Hilary's journey, and where she might be now.

Fez Casablanca Marrakesh High Atlas Mountains

After reading

3 Comprehension

Ask the following questions.

- 1 How has Hilary changed at the beginning of this section? Why do you think this is?
- 2 How does Hilary feel about meeting Tom?
- 3 What happens when she meets him?
- 4 How does Tom feel about living in the Unit?
- 5 What is the Registry?
- 6 What questions is Hilary asked there?
- 7 Why does Dr Rubec say it is a good thing that she isn't a genius?

- 8 What does Dr Van Heidem say about whether Hilary will miss the outside world?

4 Listening

Play the section of the audio where Hilary and Tom talk on the roof garden (page 59). Ask students to think of adjectives to describe how each of the characters feels at this point. This is the first point in the story at which Tom explains in his own words how and why he is here, so check understanding of this. Ask: *Why did Tom come? Did he come willingly?*

Remind students of the role-plays they did of Jessop and Tom talking earlier in the Unit. Do Tom's feelings now correspond to students' earlier ideas?

5 Playing detective

Say to the class: *Jessop has been trying to follow Hilary. Has he been able to? Do you think his plan has been successful so far? Why/Why not?*

Put students into groups to discuss what they think about the investigation by Jessop and Leblanc. Ask them to make notes about what Jessop knows for certain at this point in the story. They should list the clues he has found, how he has found them, and what significance they have. You can refer students to the Cultural notes for an explanation of the Hand of Fatima if necessary. They can copy and complete the following table:

What?	Where?	What does this mean?
A large pearl	Half a mile from the plane	Hilary survived the crash
A single pearl	In a local man's house	

The final clue is three pearls arranged in a triangle, stuck together with chewing gum. Jessop recognizes this as a sign from Hilary to say that they have gone on a plane. Why is he worried by this?

6 Writing

At the end of this section, Hilary and the rest of the people in the Unit listen to the Director talking about his vision of the future.

Ask students to discuss what the Director said, and what his ideas are. Then ask them to work individually to write a short paragraph summarizing his speech.

Ask: *What is Hilary's reaction to the speech? How does Peters change this?*

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 4 (Chapters 17–22)

Before reading

1 Speaking

At the end of the previous section (page 68), Dr Barron says to Hilary:

'My dear ... nothing is permanent. In time, the Unit will break up and fall apart. What happens here is too strange, too unreal. It will not last. But until that happens, I am happy to work here.'

Ask: *Do you agree with Dr Barron's comments here? Why/Why not? Why is Dr Barron at the Unit?*

Compare this to Peters' speech on page 73:

'Think about it properly,' said Peters sharply. 'Youth and brains – what does it really mean? Here that means Helga Needheim, ruthless and arrogant, and Torquil Ericsson, an impractical dreamer. Or Dr Barron, who would sell his grandmother to get money for his work. And your own husband, a man too frightened and nervous to work at all. And these people are going to rule the world? Don't make me laugh! It's all total nonsense!'

Ask: *Do the people who are in the Unit truly believe that it has a clear, strong purpose? Is the Director really in charge, or are people still following their own wishes and feelings? What do you think will happen to the Unit?*

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2 Guess

Peters says to Hilary that it would be best for Tom to stay in the Unit (page 73). Ask students why they think he might say this. What do they understand by the phrase *'a cage can be a safe place'*? Students can discuss this in groups, then share ideas with the class.

Ask students why the police are looking for Tom – what has he told Hilary? Why does she insist to Peters that Tom has to escape with them too?

After reading

3 Comprehension

Answer the following questions:

- 1 Who is willing to help Peters escape, and why?
- 2 Why does everybody have to go to the Emergency Area?
- 3 How does Peters record their way through the corridors?
- 4 How does Hilary feel when she meets Mr Aristides again?
- 5 Why would no one suspect Mr Aristides of anything?
- 6 What is the reason behind the creation of the Unit?
- 7 Why does Mr Aristides ask Hilary to stay at the Unit?
- 8 How do Jessop and Leblanc find Hilary's location?
- 9 Who do they take with them to the Unit, and why?
- 10 What is Tom Betterton planning to do at the end of the book?

4 Playing detective

Ask students to complete the table about the visitors that Jessop and Leblanc bring to the Unit:

Who?	Where from?	Describe their job	What part do they play in the discovery?
A Minister	France		

Refer students to the Glossary to find details of how to describe some of the jobs.

5 Comprehension

Say: *Were you surprised to discover that Peters was pursuing Tom for the murder of Elsa Mannheim?* Refer students back to the discussion they had about Tom and Peters in Before reading.

Go back over the earlier discussions about the identity of Boris, and Olive's original warning about him. How can her warning be interpreted now – was she warning Tom, or Hilary? Were they surprised to discover that Boris is Peters?

Ask students to think about how their perception of the character of Tom has changed by this revelation – were they surprised to discover that he was a criminal, or were they suspicious of him throughout? They can now come back to Peters' comment *'a cage is a safe place'*. Who was Peters trying to protect by keeping Tom in the Unit – Tom or Hilary?

6 Speaking

Put students into groups to discuss what the Unit was trying to do, and how the main characters managed to reveal what was happening there.

Ask them to discuss the idea that Aristides is *'above suspicion'* because he is so rich. Encourage students to give their responses to this. At the end, Leblanc and Jessop say that they will not be able to arrest him because he is too rich and powerful – is this a satisfactory ending?

ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

Part 1 (Chapters 1–4)

1 Research

Answers will vary.

2 Speaking

Answers will vary.

3 Comprehension

- 1 In America.
- 2 His first wife – the daughter of Dr Mannheim.
- 3 On 23rd August, when he left for Paris.
- 4 He might have accepted money and gone to work in another country.
- 5 Two people from America – Walter Griffiths and Carol Speeder.
- 6 A letter from her doctor saying she should go on holiday.
- 7 He is the cousin of Elsa, Tom's first wife.
- 8 To follow Olive.

4 Playing detective

Who...	escaped from Germany to America?	Dr Mannheim
	discovered ZE Fission?	Tom Betterton
	doesn't understand nuclear science?	Colonel Wharton
	fought in the Polish Resistance?	Major Glydr
	thinks the security reports are useless?	Mr Jessop
Whose...	plane takes a different course because of fog?	Hilary's
	father was a famous scientist?	Elsa Mannheim's
	doctor tells her to have a holiday?	Olive's

5 Speaking

Answers will vary.

6 Guess

Answers will vary.

Part 2 (Chapters 5–10)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

3 Comprehension

- 1 d
- 2 h
- 3 b
- 4 a
- 5 g
- 6 f
- 7 e
- 8 c

4 Research

Answers will vary.

5 Speaking

Answers will vary.

Part 3 (Chapters 11–16)

1 Comprehension

Answers will vary.

2 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

3 Comprehension

- 1 She is enjoying being alive again, because she has a purpose.
- 2 She is very nervous.
- 3 He has had plastic surgery, so is pleased that she doesn't recognize him. He pretends to recognize her.
- 4 He is scared and feels trapped.
- 5 The place where they record information about everyone in the Unit.
- 6 Everything: where she was born, parents' names, illnesses, hobbies, jobs, degrees, what she likes to eat and drink, etc.
- 7 Because sensitive intellectual people are not always emotionally stable.
- 8 Soon she won't miss it at all.

4 Listening

Answers will vary.

5 Playing detective

What?	Where?	What does this mean?
A large pearl	Half a mile from the plane	Hilary survived the crash
A single pearl	In a local man's house	Which direction they went
Two more pearls	In a local village	Which direction they went
Luminous 'hand of Fatima'	On the side of a car	Which direction they went
Three pearls in a triangle	An old army airfield	The next part of the journey was by plane

6 Writing

Answers will vary.

Part 4 (Chapters 17–22)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Guess

Answers will vary.

3 Comprehension

- 1 Mohammed, one of the servants, because he wants to get to America.
- 2 Because some visitors are coming to see the hospital.
- 3 By using a compass.
- 4 She is surprised, but then it all makes sense.
- 5 Because he is so rich and powerful.
- 6 He wants to buy all the young scientists, so that other countries have to buy them from him.
- 7 If she stays and Tom leaves, Tom won't tell anyone about the Unit.
- 8 They interpret a message sent in Morse code, which one of their pilots saw.
- 9 They take a group of powerful visitors: a French Minister, the American ambassador, as he will not ignore the evidence, a retired top British judge and a journalist who will want to get a big story for his newspaper.
- 10 He is planning to leave the Unit to avoid being arrested.

Destination Unknown

Agatha Christie

4 Playing detective

Who?	Where from?	Describe their job	What part do they play in the discovery?
A Minister	France	An important member of a government	Says there must be an investigation
An ambassador	America	Someone who represents their country abroad	He asks to see Andrew Peters
A retired judge	Britain	The person in a court of law who makes decisions about the law	He hears evidence about what has happened and demands answers to the questions
A journalist	Not stated	Writes stories for newspapers and magazines	He says that Tom's disappearance was front page news all over the world

5 Comprehension

Answers will vary.

6 Speaking

Answers will vary.