

The Murder at the Vicarage

Agatha Christie

SUMMARIES

Part 1: Chapters 1–8

The novel opens with the vicar, Len, and his wife, Griselda, talking about Colonel Protheroe. Further discussions about local people take place at Griselda's tea party held for four elderly ladies, Mrs Price Ridley, Miss Wetherby, Miss Hartnell and Miss Marple. Griselda and Len talk about the artist, Lawrence Redding. Len discovers Lawrence Redding kissing Mrs Protheroe and tells Lawrence he must leave the village.

One evening, Len returns to his vicarage and bumps into Lawrence, but more importantly discovers Colonel Protheroe's body slumped across his desk, he was dead ... shot through the head.

Dr Haydock and the police, Constable Hurst and Inspector Slack, are called. On arrival they talk about the time the killing could have taken place and find a note.

Lawrence goes to the police station, giving himself up and admitting to the killing. The Chief Constable, Colonel Melchett, visits the vicarage to discuss the death and then visits Dr Haydock and finally Redding himself. Redding admits to killing Colonel Protheroe with a pistol and to changing the clock time. Then they are summoned to Old Hall where Anne Protheroe also admits to killing her husband with a pistol.

Part 2: Chapters 9–16

The Chief Constable visits Miss Marple to see if she knew anything about the killing. At a quarter past six Mrs Protheroe had passed her garden and gone in by the back gate to meet her husband in the vicarage. She heard a shot and saw Redding arrive at the house and she also thought Anne would confess.

Gladys Cram, Dr Stone's secretary, visits the vicarage to find out more and Mary, the servant, admits to hearing a shot. Miss Marple is then questioned as to her views on the killing and Lawrence Redding is also further questioned and is surprised that Anne confessed. He says he saw the dead body and the pistol, but not the note. Anne is questioned, so is Mrs Price Ridley and Mrs Lestrangle who was new to the village. Len and Redding investigate the woods and bump into Inspector Slack and rule out any entry into the vicarage via the woods.

Part 3: Chapters 17–24

Inspector Slack tells Len that the call Len received was deliberate to get him out of the house. Also someone made a call from Lawrence's cottage when he was not there. Miss Marple sees Gladys go into the woods with a suitcase at midnight and return without it.

On a Saturday afternoon the inquest into Protheroe's death is held. Lawrence had found the body and pistol. Anne Protheroe had last seen her husband at 5.45 and at 6.15 had

gone to the vicarage and thought the study was empty, but would not have seen her husband if he had been sitting at the desk. Len talks of his appointment with Protheroe and the call asking him to the Abbotts' house and how he found the body. Dr Haydock said the Colonel was shot at 6.20–6.30. Evidence from the unfinished letter had 6.20 written on it and because of the clock time of death was thought to be 6.22. Mary had not heard anything and Mrs Lestrangle was too ill to give evidence. Mrs Archer, Lawrence's cleaner, had seen the pistol. The verdict of the inquest was that the killing was by Unknown Person or Persons.

Part 4: Chapters 25–32

Len visits Mrs Hartnell, Miss Wetherby and Dr Haydock and shows the Inspector the shiny stone he has found which the Inspector said was picric acid. Miss Marple visits Len and he tells her about 1) three notes he has received 2) the picture at Old Hall with the face cut out 3) the shiny brown stone.

Colonel Melchett and Len meet to discuss the case further and whilst talking there is a phone call and the person on the line says they want to confess to the killing. Len recognizes the voice and goes to see Mr Hawes the curate who is asleep with pills round around him. They believe Hawes is guilty, but Miss Marple intercedes and claims Lawrence was involved in the murder, and Anne actually killed Mr Protheroe with the pistol that was hidden in the plant pot. They had planned the murder carefully. Lawrence visited the vicar knowing he would be out, he made the call pretending he was the wife of a dying man. At 6.20 Anne talked to Miss Marple and then went round to the study where she shot Mr Protheroe, taking the gun from the plant pot where Lawrence had put it and throwing it on the floor. A silencer stopped anyone from hearing the shot. Miss Marple saw Lawrence and Anne coming out of the studio happy rather than sad which should have been the case as Lawrence had gone to visit Len to tell him he was leaving the village.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 1 (Chapters 1–8)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Tell students that most English villages have a church belonging to the Church of England. The church and the surrounding village are called a parish. Each parish is looked after by a vicar. The vicar is assisted by various people. In pairs, have students discuss what they think could be the roles of the following people. If they get stuck, they can use the definitions in the Glossary to help them.

a vicar	
a curate	
a churchwarden	

2 Guess

- a) Ask students in groups to guess the answers to the following questions about the novel.
- From the title of the novel what do they think happens in the novel?
 - Is this a likely place for such a thing to happen in the students' opinion?
- b) There is a lot of vocabulary in the novel linked to the church. Pre-teach the following words which all occur in Chapter 1: churchwarden, sermon, collection bag, curate, vicar

After reading

3 Speaking

Agatha Christie likes to describe her characters in great detail and she also gives her characters an air of mystery.

Ask students who makes the following statement and who it refers to:

'watching me with an anxious expression'.

Ask students to describe the person with the anxious expression fully and then discuss as a class what mysteries that person could be hiding.

4 Comprehension

Have students create a table of information about the following characters. Check answers against the Character List, and by having students create a master table on the board. Encourage students to note down as much information as they can find.

1 Mary	
2 Dennis	
3 Colonel Protheroe	
4 Len Clement	
5 Griselda Clement	
6 Mr Hawes	
7 Mrs Price-Ridley	
8 Miss Wetherby	
9 Miss Hartnell	
10 Miss Marple	
11 Mrs Lestrangle	

5 Speaking

Read the following sentence out to the students: 'I told him that people had been saying that since the beginning of time'. Ask the class:

- Who says this?
- What does it refer to?
- Can you explain exactly what is meant here?
- Do you agree with the statement and why?

6 Playing detective

Constable Hurst arrives at the vicarage with his notebook and asks questions. After a while Inspector Slack also arrives. Both policemen ask questions. Have students read this section of the book and then complete the form with the answers.

Questions	Answers
1 What was the cause of death?	
2 What was the weapon?	
3 When did the death happen?	
4 Time of the crime?	

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 2 (Chapters 9–16)

Before reading

1 Speaking

At the start of this section the Chief Constable says he is going to visit Miss Marple.

- 1 Ask students what they already know about Miss Marple.
- 2 Do they think a visit to her will be useful? Why?
- 3 What other books in the series (refer to the list at the back of the book) have they read with Miss Marple in them?

2 Guess

Tell the students: Agatha Christie describes life in the later 19th and early 20th century. Who are the following people? Some you will have already come across, others will be introduced later on in the book.

Rose

Gladdie

Clara

Mary

Tell students there are two main words for describing these people; can they guess the two words?

After reading

3 Language

Have students guess the meaning of the following words from Chapters 9, 10 and 11.

- 1 maid
- 2 woods
- 3 wickedness
- 4 stepmother
- 5 put up
- 6 poaching
- 7 intuition
- 8 clues

4 Follow-up activity

Have students complete these sentences with the words from Activity 3.

- 1 The _____ was disliked by the family.
- 2 She had good _____ at all times.
- 3 The _____ was quick and efficient at her work.
- 4 There was a rustle in the _____.
- 5 _____ was prohibited in that county.
- 6 The _____ were there, but the investigating officer could not see them.
- 7 She had to _____ _____ with a lot as a child.
- 8 The _____ of the people who had committed the murder could not be imagined.

5 Research

Miss Cram says: 'Dr Stone thinks only about archaeology'. Dr Stone is clearly a keen archaeologist. Ask students to work in pairs and guess what an archaeologist is. Have them also guess what an artist does (Lawrence Redding), a Colonel (Melchett) does and a secretary (Gladys Cram) does.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 3 (Chapters 17–24)

Before reading

1 Speaking

An inquest takes place in this section of the book. Have students brainstorm words connected with an inquest. Share the words with the class to build up a bank of words used to talk about an inquest. For example: verdict, guilty, murder, evidence

2 Guess

The inquest is held into the killing of Colonel Protheroe. Ask students to list all the facts they know about the murder, writing a mini inquest document and guessing the verdict.

After reading

3 Language

The following words occur in Chapters 17 and 18. Insert the words into the correct sentences.

- 1 lodge
- 2 wiped off
- 3 blackmailed
- 4 'Got it!'
- 5 inquest
- 6 coroner
- 7 medical certificate
- 8 verdict
- 9 rushed

- 1 The _____ was a decisive man.
- 2 The _____ was old and from the 18th century.
- 3 The woman had been _____ by her servant.
- 4 The woman was ill and had a _____.
- 5 The _____ was guilty without doubt.
- 6 She was _____ to hospital.
- 7 She was puzzled but then cried _____.
- 8 The fingerprints were _____.
- 9 The _____ was a long affair.

4 Comprehension

Inspector Slack has been making further investigations into the murder. On page 56 he talks about this. Have students list what he has discovered.

Phone call	Where was the call made from?	Reason for the call?
1 Len's call		
2 Mrs Price-Ridley's call		

Ask students: *Who is being made to look guilty?*

5 Speaking

Miss Marple says: 'Clever young men know so little about life.' In pairs, have students discuss why she might be saying this.

Ask the class if they agree with Miss Marple's statement and why.

6 Listening

Play the inquest at the beginning of Chapter 18 on pages 59 and 60.

Have students list the evidence everyone gives.

Name	Evidence given
Lawrence Redding	
Mrs Protheroe	
Len	
Dr Haydock	
Inspector Slack	
Mary the servant	
Mrs Lestrangle	
Mrs Archer	

Ask students: *Where was the inquest held? What was the verdict?*

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 4 (Chapters 25–32)

Before reading

1 Playing detective

In the last few chapters of the book we find out who murdered Colonel Protheroe. Ask students what their ideas are.

Have students discuss who could have written the anonymous unpleasant letter the vicar has just received, and why they wrote it.

Elicit opinions from the class.

2 Guess

The following vocabulary will be new to students. Ask the students to guess the meaning of:

- 1 picric acid
- 2 a silencer

After reading

3 Writing

Len makes three visits to the women that have written him notes. Have students write notes about what each woman tells him.

Name of person visited	Information
Miss Hartnell	
Miss Wetherby	
Mrs Price Ridley	

4 Speaking

Write the following quote on the board: 'You see, because I live alone, I need a hobby. I could, of course, choose sewing or drawing, but my hobby is human nature.'

Ask students:

- 1 Who says this?
- 2 What does he/she mean by 'human nature'?

Now ask students to talk about their hobbies with a partner and report back to the class.

Example: What is your favourite hobby? My favourite hobby is swimming.

5 Language

The following words are all underlined in Part 4 of the book. Have students guess the meaning of the words, then check their answers in the Glossary at the back of the book.

- 1 anonymous
- 2 explosive
- 3 coincidence
- 4 trap
- 5 worship

6 Follow-up activity

Now, have students complete each sentence with one of the words from Activity 5.

- 1 They stood back because they thought there was an _____ in the bag.
- 2 What a _____ we bumped into you.
- 3 The mouse was caught firmly in the _____.
- 4 They all received _____ letters.
- 5 She said, 'I _____ you'.

7 Comprehension

Have students put the sentences in the correct order.

- _ Just before twenty past six she walked past my garden and stopped to speak to me.
- _ She took the pistol from the pot, came up behind him and shot him.
- _ This was so that I would notice that she had no gun with her.
- _ Then she dropped the pistol on the floor and walked down to the studio!
- _ Then she went round the corner of the house to the study window.
- _ And, very strangely, she did not take her handbag.
- 1 Mrs Protheroe and her husband had just gone into the village.
- _ The poor colonel was sitting at his desk writing his letter to you.

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ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

Part 1 (Chapters 1–8)

1 Speaking

a vicar	Leads church services, during which he gives a sermon – a talk about spiritual and religious matters. The vicar is responsible for taking care of the spiritual needs of the people of the village, so often visits those who are ill or have other worries. The vicar will carry out baptisms, marriage ceremonies and funerals and is generally a very respected person in the local area. People will often ask the vicar for advice.
a curate	A less experienced vicar, but also trained and paid for by the Church authorities.
a churchwarden	These people are not paid but give their time to support the vicar in his spiritual responsibilities, to set a good example to others, and also to look after more practical matters, such as the church's money and the condition of the church building.

2 Guess

- a)
Possible answers.
- 1 A murder is committed at the vicarage and one would assume the vicar and/or his wife are the victims. It could also be the murder of a servant or cook working in the vicarage.
 - 2 As a place belonging to the church one would not really expect a murder to take place there.
- b) Refer to the Glossary for an explanation of each of these words.

3 Speaking

It is the vicar who refers to Mrs Lestrangle. She is a cultured woman who has oddly come to live in a small village. She is tall, her hair is red gold and her make-up is perfect. Her eyes were golden also.
She is hiding something. Possible answers: She could be hiding a secret liaison with someone in the village. She could be escaping a life that she found unbearable in the city. She could just simply want the change of living in a village rather than a city. She could know something

about someone in the village and wants to let the vicar know what she knows.

4 Comprehension

Refer to the Character list for answers.

5 Speaking

- 1 Len
- 2 It refers to the phrase said by Lawrence: This isn't the usual sort of love affair between Anne and me.
- 3 This means that for centuries people have been falling in love and stating that their love affair is unique and different from any other affair they have had. Both partners truly love each other.
- 4 *Answers will vary.*

6 Playing detective

Questions	Answers
1 What was the cause of death?	Shot through the head
2 What was the weapon?	A small pistol, a Mauser .25
3 When did the death happen?	Dead for just over half an hour
4 Time of the crime?	Twenty-two minutes past six

Part 2 (Chapters 9–16)

1 Speaking

Possible answers:

- 1 Miss Marple is a sharp elderly lady who has a keen interest in human nature.
- 2 Miss Marple usually has lots of information and reads situations perceptively so a visit to her is useful.
- 3 Examples include: *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?*, *The Moving Finger*, *They Do It with Mirrors*, *A Pocket Full of Rye* and *4.50 from Paddington*.

2 Guess

All the people listed are servants. The two words for these type of people are servant or maid.

3 Language

Answers will vary.

4 Follow-up activity

- 1 The stepmother was disliked by the family.
- 2 She had good intuition at all times.
- 3 The maid was quick and efficient at her work.
- 4 There was a rustle in the woods.
- 5 Poaching was prohibited in that county.
- 6 The clues were there, but the investigating officer could not see them.

- 7 She had to put up with a lot as a child.
- 8 The wickedness of the people who had committed the murder could not be imagined.

5 Research

See the Cultural notes for a definition of an archaeologist. An artist is someone who paints. A Colonel is an officer in the army, a secretary does administrative work.

Part 3 (Chapters 17–24)

1 Speaking

Possible words: evidence, court, verdict, coroner, guilty, innocent, death, body

2 Guess

Lawrence had found the body and pistol. Anne Protheroe had last seen her husband at 5.45 and at 6.15 had gone to the vicarage and thought the study was empty, but would not have seen her husband if he had been sitting at the desk. Len talks of his appointment with Protheroe and the call asking him to the Abbotts' house and how he found the body. Dr Haydock said the Colonel was shot at 6.20–6.30. Evidence from the unfinished letter had 6.20 written on it and because of the clock time of death was thought to be 6.22. Mary had not heard anything and Mrs Lestrangle was too ill to give evidence. Mrs Archer, Lawrence's cleaner, had seen the pistol. The verdict of the inquest was that the killing was by Unknown Person or Persons.

3 Language

- 1 The coroner was a decisive man.
- 2 The lodge was old and from the 18th century.
- 3 The woman had been blackmailed by her servant.
- 4 The woman was ill and had a medical certificate.
- 5 The verdict was guilty without doubt.
- 6 She was rushed to hospital.
- 7 She was puzzled but then cried 'Got it!'
- 8 The fingerprints were wiped off easily.
- 9 The inquest was a long affair.

4 Comprehension

Phone call	Where was the call made from?	Reason for the call?
1 Len's call	Put through from the North Lodge of Old Hall.	Made to get Len out of the house.
2 Mrs Price-Ridley's call	Came from Lawrence Redding's cottage.	Not Lawrence who made the call but made to look like it.

The Murder at the Vicarage

Agatha Christie

Lawrence Redding is being made to look guilty.

5 Speaking

Miss Marple discusses this in the context of the writings of her nephew Raymond West. She says he writes clever books but that people are not as unpleasant as he makes them.

Other answers will depend on the experiences of each individual, but the older you get, clearly the more experience you have.

6 Listening

Name	Evidence given
Lawrence Redding	Found body and admitted pistol belonged to him.
Mrs Protheroe	Last seen husband at a quarter to six in the village. She goes to vicarage at six fifteen and thinks her husband is not in his study, but realises later if her husband had been there she would not have seen him through the window.
Len	Describes appointment with Protheroe and phone call asking him to go to the Abbotts' house. Describes how he had found the body. Several people knew that Colonel Protheroe was going to visit him that evening.
Dr Haydock	Describes the appearance of the body and the exact injuries. Believes the Colonel had been shot between 6.20 and 6.30.
Inspector Slack	Careful and short evidence. The unfinished letter was produced and the time of 6.20 on it noted. Time of death thought to be 6.22 because of the clock.
Mary the servant	She hadn't heard anything. Colonel Protheroe had arrived at a quarter past six.
Mrs Lestrangle	Too ill to attend the inquest.
Mrs Archer	She recognized the pistol. She had seen it on the day of the murder at lunchtime.

The inquest was held at the Blue Boar. The verdict was Murder by Person or Persons Unknown.

Part 4 (Chapters 25–32)

1 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

2 Guess

- 1 Picric acid is an explosive. It explodes if you drop something heavy on it.
- 2 A silencer is placed on a gun to avoid anyone hearing the shot.

3 Write

Name of person visited	Information
Miss Hartnell	Claims Mrs Lestrangle was not in when she visited her. This was at nearly six o'clock.
Miss Wetherby	A person who knows the truth is someone else's servant. She saw a lady walking up the road to the vicarage on the day of the murder look around to see if anyone had seen her. The name of the lady begins with an L.
Mrs Price Ridley	Clara, her servant, was standing at the front gate when she heard a sneeze on the day of the murder when no one was in the house. The murderer was hiding in the bushes and had a cold.

4 Speaking

- 1 Miss Marple
- 2 She means the behaviour and habits of men and women.

Other answers will vary.

5 Language

Refer to the Glossary for answers.

6 Follow-up activity

- 1 They stood back because they thought there was an explosive in the bag.
- 2 What a coincidence that we bumped into you.
- 3 The mouse was caught firmly in the trap.
- 4 They all received anonymous letters.
- 5 She said, 'I worship you'.

7 Comprehension

- 1 Mrs Protheroe and her husband had just gone into the village.
- 2 And, very strangely, she did not take her handbag.
- 3 Just before twenty past six she walked past my garden and stopped to speak to me.
- 4 This was so that I would notice that she had no gun with her.
- 5 Then she went round the corner of the house to the study window.
- 6 The poor colonel was sitting at his desk writing his letter to you.
- 7 She took the pistol from the pot, came up behind him and shot him.
- 8 Then she dropped the pistol on the floor and walked down to the studio!