

Murder on the Orient Express

Agatha Christie

SUMMARIES

Part 1: Chapters 1–4

On the Taurus Express train from Syria to Istanbul, Monsieur Poirot observes the two other passengers, Colonel Arbuthnot travelling from India and Miss Mary Debenham travelling from Baghdad. When the train is delayed, Miss Debenham appears very upset that she might miss the Simplon Orient Express from Istanbul.

In Istanbul, Poirot tries to get a ticket for the Simplon Orient Express but it is unusually full for the time of year. Luckily, Poirot's old friend, Monsieur Bouc, is one of the directors of the train company and is also travelling on the Simplon Orient Express. Monsieur Bouc finds space for him in the Istanbul-Calais compartment.

Another passenger, Mr Ratchett, offers Poirot a job. He says that someone has threatened to kill him. He wants Poirot to make sure it doesn't happen. Poirot does not like this man, and refuses.

That night, Poirot is woken by a loud cry and someone ringing their bell for the conductor. He hears a voice from Ratchett's compartment, speaking in French. Poirot notices that the time is 12.37 am.

Part 2: Chapters 5–8

The train has stopped because there is too much snow. The carriage is noisy. Poirot is woken again by a loud noise against his door. He opens the door to see a woman in a red dressing-gown walking away.

The next morning, Bouc tells Poirot that Mr Ratchett has been stabbed 12 times and killed. Dr Constantine, another passenger, explains that the blows are strange because some were very powerful and some were not, at least one was by someone who is left-handed and some were made after Ratchett was dead. Because the train is stuck in the snow and they cannot call the police, Bouc asks Poirot to solve the case. Poirot realises that the murderer must still be on the train.

Poirot examines the dead man's compartment. He finds: a pipe cleaner, a glass, a broken gold watch, a handkerchief with the initial H on it and some matches.

On a small piece of burned paper he can see four words: *-member little Daisy Armstrong*. He remembers a case in America where a child called Daisy Armstrong was kidnapped and murdered by a man called Cassetti. Her pregnant mother, Sonia Armstrong, lost her baby and then died herself. Her father, Colonel Armstrong, and their French maid killed themselves. Because of his powerful connections, the jury found Cassetti not guilty. Suddenly, Poirot understands who the dead man is (Cassetti) and why he might have been killed (revenge).

American Mrs Hubbard, whose compartment was next to Cassetti's, says that the murderer was in her compartment and that she has found a button from a conductor's jacket

there. She also says that she is not sure if the door between the two compartments was bolted.

Part 3: Chapters 9–12

Everyone seems to have an alibi for the murder: none of the ladies have red dressing-gowns, the mystery conductor has disappeared.

Rich Russian Princess Dragomiroff tells Poirot that she was close friends with Linda Arden, Sonia Armstrong's mother, and that she was godmother to Sonia Armstrong.

Poirot sees that Count and Countess Andrenyi's diplomatic passport has some grease on it near the Countess's name.

Poirot finds out that Ratchett had hired another passenger, Cyrus Hardman, to protect him too.

Mrs Hubbard finds the murder weapon (an ordinary knife) in her wash-bag.

Part 4: Chapters 13–17

Poirot, Constantine and Bouc find pipe cleaners in Colonel Arbuthnot's luggage and they find that the label on the Countess's suitcase is wet. They also find the conductor's uniform in Hildegard Schmidt's luggage and the red silk dressing-gown in Poirot's own suitcase.

Poirot remembers that Mr Ratchett didn't speak French and yet the voice he heard at 12.37 am from Mr Ratchett's compartment spoke in French.

Poirot works out that the Countess is in fact not called Elena but Helena (this is why her passport and luggage label have been changed), and that she is in fact, Helena Goldenberg, the younger sister of Sonia Armstrong. Poirot works out that everyone in the carriage has a link to the Armstrong family, including Mrs Hubbard who is really Linda Arden. They all, except for Hardman, admit their connections. Everyone has a motive for killing Cassetti.

Poirot offers two possible solutions to the crime. In the first, Mr Ratchett's enemy who had sent the threatening letters got on the train dressed as a conductor, stabbed Ratchett and left the compartment through Mrs Hubbard's compartment. He put the knife in Mrs Hubbard's wash-bag and his uniform in Hildegard Schmidt's suitcase, then left the train. Dr Constantine says that this is an unlikely solution. Poirot offers his second solution. All of the passengers and the conductor wanted Ratchett dead, so they planned this journey to kill him. He was stabbed by 12 people, who were acting as 'jury' after the real jury failed to provide justice. The only person who didn't actually stab Ratchett was the Countess. Each provided an alibi for at least one other passenger so that no single person could be proved guilty. The passengers admit that this is the truth.

Poirot asks Bouc and Constantine which solution they would like to present to the police at the next stop. They say the first as everyone agrees that Cassetti got what he deserved.

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SUMMARIES

Part 1 (Chapters 1–4)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Write the title 'Murder on the Orient Express' on the board. Elicit the term *title*. Ask students to discuss the following questions with a partner:

- *What do you think the title tells us will happen in the story?*
- *What do you know about the Orient Express?*

If students don't know what the Orient Express is, encourage them to make a guess as to what it might be. Draw their attention to the preposition 'on' which may help them to deduce that it is a form of transport.

Then ask students to read Cultural note 2 on page 84 of the book and to study the map showing the route. If possible show students a picture of the original Orient Express.

Ask students if they have ever travelled overnight on a train. Ask *Did you sleep in a compartment?* (check understanding of *compartment*, referring to the Glossary and to the diagram on page 83) *What was it like?* If students have not had the experience, ask them to imagine it. Brainstorm some ideas on the board. Then ask them to think about how travel would have been on the Orient Express in 1934 when the story was written. You could ask questions such as:

- *Would you be able to feel the train moving?*
- *Would the train be moving quickly or slowly?*
- *Would it be noisy or quiet?*
- *How many beds do you think would be in one compartment?*
- *Would the bed be wide or narrow?*
- *Where would you eat your meals?*
- *Would there be a toilet in your sleeping compartment?* etc.

Refer students to the diagram on page 83 to look for answers to some of these questions.

After reading

2 Comprehension

Ask students the names of the characters from Part 1 (Hercule Poirot, Colonel Arbuthnot, Mary Debenham, Monsieur Bouc, Mr Ratchett, Hector MacQueen, Princess Dragomiroff and Mrs Hubbard). Write the names on the board or on a large piece of paper. Explain that you are going to read descriptions of five of the characters aloud and ask students to write down who each one is.

Descriptions:

- 1 I'm British but I've lived in India for a very long time. I'm in my forties. I work in the army.
- 2 I'm an elderly man. I come from Belgium. I'm a director of the company that runs the Simplon Orient Express. I'm friends with Hercule Poirot.
- 3 I'm an old, very rich lady. Some people think I'm ugly but they would not tell me this because I'm very important.
- 4 I'm American. I'm in my sixties. I'm very rich and important too, but I don't have a title. I made my money as a businessman. I have a secretary and a valet who work for me. But I'm worried. I think someone is going to try and kill me.
- 5 I am another elderly Belgian man. I am short and I have a moustache. I used to work in the police, but now I'm retired. However, I still love solving an interesting case.

Check responses and ask students if they can think of any extra information to add to each description.

3 Writing

Ask students to work in pairs to write brief descriptions for the remaining three characters from Part 1. (Mrs Hubbard, Mary Debenham and Hector MacQueen) Circulate, encouraging them to include physical descriptions, background story, notes on people the character knows or speaks to and anything important he or she has done or said. Tell them they can write as much as they like.

4 Speaking

Pairs join together and take turns to read their descriptions aloud to each other and guess who is being described.

5 Playing detective

Say *One of the characters we have been discussing is going to be murdered on the Orient Express in Part 2. In pairs, can you guess who the murder victim will be?*

Do not confirm any suspicions about Ratchett. Students should also think of one or two possible motives for the murder if they can. Ask them to write the name down on a piece of paper with their own names on the back. Fold the papers and keep them safe.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 2 (Chapters 5–8)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Recap what has happened in the story so far. Write the following words on the board.

The Orient Express	Hercule Poirot	12.37 am
Number 1	Mr Ratchett	

Ask students to explain how each one relates to Part 1 of *Murder on the Orient Express*.

2 Language

Remind students that someone is going to be killed on the Orient Express. Write the following words on the board. Explain that these are important words in the story. Students should research the words to make sure they understand the meanings.

kidnap	innocent	guilty	evidence	victim	revenge	clues
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Students could use the internet, dictionaries and the glossary at the back of the book.

3 Language

Tell students that in Part 2, Hector MacQueen shows Poirot a letter to Mr Ratchett that says:

We're planning to get you.

Ask students if they can work out what 'get you' may mean in this context. Confirm or correct their suggestions.

After reading

4 Writing

Ask students the names of any new characters introduced in Part 2. (Dr Constantine, Pierre Michel and Edward Masterman) In pairs, ask students to write three new character descriptions for these characters. Feed back as a class.

5 Playing detective

Ask students to make a timeline of the events of the night of the murder. They may want to do this in landscape. They should refer to the text to put the events in order. Draw the example at the bottom of this page on the board. Encourage students to leave space and add to their timelines as the story develops.

6 Comprehension

In Part 1, Poirot refuses to help Mr Ratchett, but in Part 2 he agrees to help Monsieur Bouc by solving the murder. He says:

'...the truth is, I find this problem very interesting.'

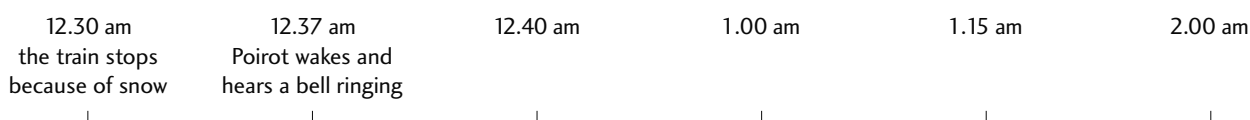
Ask students to read page 16 of the story again and to find out what interests Poirot about this case.

You may also wish to refer students to page 21 when Poirot says:

'Everything is becoming beautifully clear! The murderer was a very strong man, he was weak, it was a woman, it was a right-handed person, it was a left-handed person – ah, what fun!'

7 Playing detective

Randomly, hand out the papers on which students made their predictions about who would be the murder victim. Ask students to open the papers they have been given and read whose prediction they have and who they predicted would be murdered. Congratulate all those who were correct. See if anyone guessed the correct motive i.e. the kidnapping and murder of Daisy Armstrong. (This is very unlikely!)



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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 3 (Chapters 9–12)

Before reading

1 Research

In Chapter 10 on page 40, Colonel Arbuthnot and Poirot discuss the kidnapping case and Cassetti's recent murder.

Colonel Arbuthnot: Then the rat deserved what he got.

Though I would have preferred to see him punished by the law.

Poirot: You prefer the law to private revenge, Colonel?

Colonel Arbuthnot: Well, trial by jury is a good and fair method.

These themes are important in the story. Have students find out the meanings of the following words:

punish

law

jury

They can use a dictionary, the internet, the Cultural notes on page 85 at the back of the book and the Glossary on pages 86–89.

2 Listening

Read or play Chapter 7, from:

'The real name of the victim...' to 'So now we have to ask ourselves, is this a crime of private revenge?'

In groups, ask students to start to make a family tree for the Armstrong family. Students should include: Colonel Armstrong, Linda Arden, Daisy Armstrong, Mrs (Sonia) Armstrong and Mrs Armstrong's sister (whose name they don't know yet so they could put a question mark next to her). Ask them to add the names of any servants or characters associated with the family, i.e. the French maid (they should also put a question mark next to her name). Play track 8 of the audio, (which is Chapter 8 of the text) from:

'I have learned that Ratchett, as you thought, was a false name' ... to 'Cassetti deserved to die!'

Ask students to add any further names to their trees.

Tell students they are going to listen to an extract that they haven't heard yet. Ask them to note down any other characters associated with the Armstrong family.

Play track 9 from:

'Did you know the Armstrong family?' ... to 'I believe she married an Englishman but I can't remember his name.'

After reading

3 Speaking

Write the following four names on the board with arrows between them:

Ratchett > Cassetti > Daisy Armstrong > Princess Dragomiroff

Ask students to work in pairs and to link the four names using what they have learned in the story. You could provide the first link, i.e. *Ratchett's real name was actually Cassetti. Cassetti...*

Ask a volunteer pair to read their links aloud. Ask the rest of the class to correct and add any detail as necessary.

4 Writing

Ask students the names of any new characters from Part 3. (Greta Ohlsson, Hildegard Schmidt, Count Andrenyi, Countess Andrenyi, Mr Hardman and Antonio Foscarelli.) Allocate one new character to each pair (you may have to duplicate some characters).

In pairs, ask students to write a new character description for their character.

Encourage them to search the text for information about them. Feed back as a class.

5 Playing detective

Reread aloud Poirot's speech from page 50:

'Last night on the train there are two strangers. There is the conductor, and there is also a tall, slim woman in a red dressing-gown. She, too, has disappeared. Where are they, these two? And where are the uniform and the red dressing-gown?'

Ask students to discuss the two questions Poirot asks *Can you think of any possible solutions? Who do you think these two people are? Did they kill Cassetti?*

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Part 4 (Chapters 13–17)

Before reading

1 Speaking

Quickly recap the events that have happened in the story so far by asking the following questions:

- 1 Where does the story take place?
- 2 Who is the famous detective on the train?
- 3 What crime has happened?
- 4 Who was murdered?
- 5 What was his real name?
- 6 How was he murdered?
- 7 Where was he murdered?
- 8 Why was he murdered?
- 9 Who on the train is connected to Daisy Armstrong?
- 10 Which two characters have disappeared?
- 11 What clues does Poirot have?

2 Writing

Say *Choose a character from the passengers on the Orient Express.* (they can choose any character except for Poirot)

Ask them to quickly note down (or go back through and find in the Character list on page 87) the following information:

- anything they know about the visual appearance of their character
- anything about what their character does
- where they live or are travelling from and to
- what they are like
- who they like or dislike on the train
- who they have spoken to on the train
- where they were and what they were doing when the murder probably happened
- anything they saw or heard at the time of the murder.

Then ask them to think about:

- how their character might be feeling now that a murder has happened on the train
- who their character might suspect did the murder.

Now say *Using your notes, imagine you are that character and write a letter to a friend or family member, explaining what has happened on the train and how you feel about it.*

Suggest an appropriate word length.

When students have finished, you could display the letters and let students circulate and read several each or you could 'post' the letters, so that each student reads one letter. They could then make a guess as to which character wrote which letter.

After reading

3 Speaking

Ask the class *Were you surprised to learn that 12 of the travellers on the train were involved in the murder?* Ask students to discuss in groups if they had predicted this scenario (or that it was a group who had committed the crime together).

4 Comprehension

To check students' understanding, ask them to complete the family tree they started in Part 3 with the names of each of the passengers (except for Dr Constantine, Hercule Poirot and Monsieur Bouc) and the conductor on the Istanbul–Calais carriage and their links to the Armstrong household. Check answers open class.

5 Speaking

Either read aloud pages 73 and 74 or play track 17.

Ask *How many possible solutions does Poirot give?* In pairs, ask students to discuss the differences between the two possible solutions. Draw a grid on the board, and ask students to come and write differences in the columns.

Solution 1	Solution 2

Discuss with the class why Monsieur Bouc and Dr Constantine agree to say that Solution 1 is the one they will present to the police. Ask students if they would have said the same and discuss why or why not.

6 Language

Write the following words randomly on the board.

12 jury guilty judge revenge victim blows
death penalty

Put students into teams of three. Give them two minutes to discuss the words and how they fit into the story. Choose a team to go first. They choose one of the words and explain what it means and how it is relevant to the story. Allocate one point for a correct definition and a further point for how it relates to the story. Teams can steal points if a team is incorrect and earn extra points if they can add more relevant details of how the word is important to the story. Teams take turns to choose and describe a word. The team with the most points at the end wins.

NB: You may want to teach students the word *justice* — in this context it relates to someone being punished for a crime they committed.

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ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

Part 1 (Chapters 1–4)

1 Speaking

Answers will vary.

2 Comprehension

- 1 Colonel Arbuthnot
- 2 Monsieur Bouc
- 3 Princess Dragomiroff
- 4 Mr Ratchett
- 5 Hercule Poirot

3 Writing

Sample answers:

Mrs Hubbard: I am American. I am travelling alone but I do love to chat to people. Some people say I chat too much and my daughters think that I'm a little bit silly.

Mary Debenham: I am an English governess. I love children. I am tall and slim and I have grey eyes. I have been working for a family in Baghdad. I do not want to miss the train in Istanbul – it is very important to me.

Hector MacQueen: I am American too. I work for Mr Ratchett. I write letters for him and things like that. He's not always very nice to me.

4 Speaking

Answers will vary.

5 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

Part 2 (Chapters 5–8)

1 Speaking

The Orient Express – the train that the passengers are travelling on from Istanbul to Calais.

Hercule Poirot – the famous Belgian detective who is travelling on the train.

12.37 am – the time that Hercule Poirot is woken at and when he hears a voice from Ratchett's compartment.

Number 1 – the number of Hercule Poirot's sleeping compartment.

Mr Ratchett – an American businessman who Hercule Poirot does not like. He says he's been threatened. He rings the bell for the conductor in the middle of the night and then says in French 'It was a mistake'.

2 Language

See glossary for definitions.

3 Language

'get you' here is a threat. It usually means to do someone harm, in this case, to kill the receiver of the letter.

4 Writing

Sample answers:

Dr Constantine: I am a doctor. I'm Greek. I am quite little and I have dark hair.

Pierre Michel: I am French. I am a train conductor. I work on the Orient Express in the Istanbul-Calais carriage.

Edward Masterman: I am English. I work as a valet to Mr Ratchett.

5 Playing detective

12.30 am the train stops because of snow	12.37 am Poirot wakes and hears a bell ringing	12.40 am Poirot hears a voice from Mr Ratchett's compartment speaking in French to Pierre Michel	1.00 am Pierre Michel went to the Athens carriage	1.15 am The time on Mr Ratchett's broken watch Poirot was about to ring his bell when he heard Mrs Hubbard's bell ring and Pierre Michel answer	2.00 am Pierre Michel was sat in his seat again
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6 Comprehension

Students should work out that Poirot likes the fact that none of the details make sense. They may refer to the chain across the door, the broken window in the compartment, the violent stabbing, the fact that the victim was stabbed 12 times, the evidence that it may be a woman and the conflicting evidence that some of the blows were too strong to be a woman, etc.

7 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

Part 3 (Chapters 9–12)

1 Research

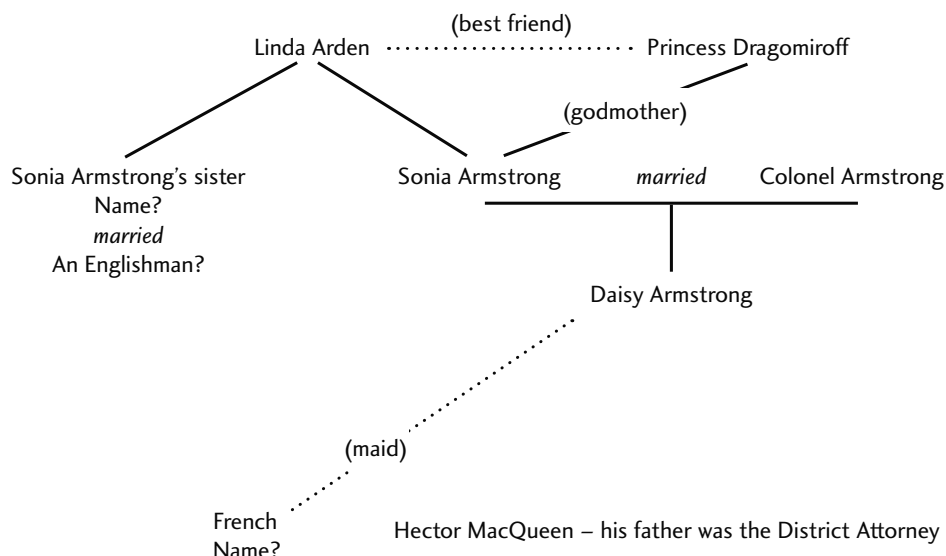
See glossary and cultural notes for definitions / explanations of law and jury.

'Punish' means to make someone suffer for something bad they have done.

2 Listening

See Family tree below.

Armstrong Household Family Tree



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ANSWER KEY (CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES)

3 Speaking

Ratchett's real name was Casseti. Casseti kidnapped and murdered Daisy Armstrong. Daisy Armstrong was the daughter of Princess Dragomiroff's god-daughter.

4 Writing

Sample answers:

Greta Ohlsson: I am Swedish. I am 49 years old. I don't speak English very well. I am a nurse.

Hildegard Schmidt: I am German. I am a maid. I work for Princess Dragomiroff.

Count Andrenyi: I am Hungarian. I am a diplomat. I work in Istanbul.

Countess Andrenyi: I am married to Count Andrenyi. I am American. I am beautiful and young.

Mr Hardman: I am American. I am big. I am a salesman. I am travelling from Istanbul to Paris.

Antonio Foscarelli: I am Italian. I am a car salesman for Ford cars. I am a US citizen.

5 Playing detective

Answers will vary.

Part 4 (Chapters 13–17)

1 Speaking

- on the Orient Express
- Monsieur Poirot
- a murder
- Mr Ratchett
- Casseti
- He was stabbed 12 times.
- in his compartment/bed
- as revenge for the kidnap and killing of a child called Daisy Armstrong

- Princess Dragomiroff was her mother's godmother; Hector MacQueen's father was the lawyer who tried to put Casseti in prison.
- a conductor and a woman in a red silk dressing-gown
- matches, a broken gold watch, a glass, a pipe cleaner, a knife, a button, a handkerchief.

2 Writing

Answers will vary.

3 Speaking

Answers will vary.

4 Comprehension

See Family tree below.

5 Speaking

Sample answer:

Solution 1	Solution 2
The murderer left the train.	The murderer was still on the train.
There was only one murderer.	All twelve passengers murdered Ratchett/Casseti.
No one on the train was connected with Casseti or the Armstrongs.	Everyone on the train was connected to Casseti and the Armstrongs.

6 Language

12 – There are 12 men and women in a jury. There are 12 members of the Armstrong household on the train. They have formed their own jury. 12 people stabbed Casseti.

Jury – A jury is made up of 12 members of the public. They listen to the evidence in a

criminal case and decide if a person is innocent or guilty. The jury in the Casseti case, found Casseti innocent. The 12 members of the Armstrong household have formed their own jury to see that justice is done.

Guilty – If someone is guilty of committing a crime then they did the crime. The 12 know that Casseti was guilty of the murder of Daisy Armstrong but the jury did not find him guilty because he was rich enough to pay his way out.

Judge – A judge listens to the evidence in a criminal case and guides the jury to make their decision. The judge let Casseti go free.

Revenge – This is when you hurt someone who has hurt you or someone you love. The 12 want revenge for Daisy's death and the deaths of her mother and father, her unborn brother or sister and the French maid.

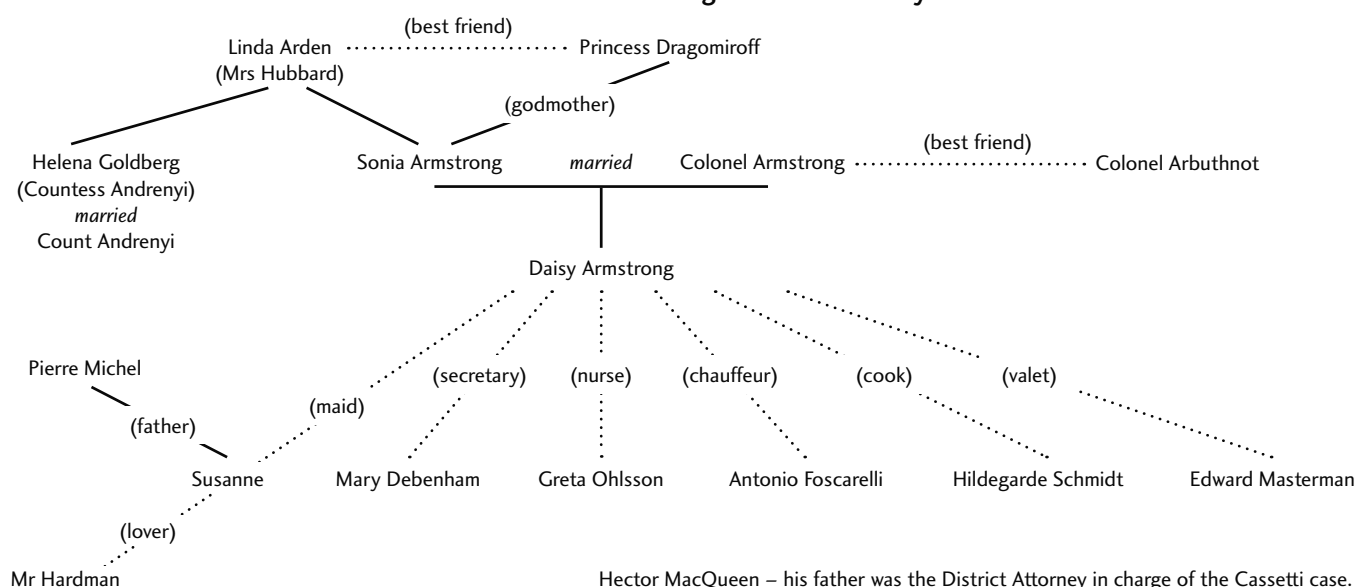
Victim – A victim is someone who has been hurt or killed by someone or something.

Although Casseti (Ratchett) is the victim in this story – the real victims are Daisy Armstrong, her mother, father, unborn sibling, the French maid and the remaining members of the Armstrong family who have had to live knowing that the murderer was never convicted.

Blows – Each of the 12 self-appointed jury members strikes a blow with the knife at Casseti. This way they are all responsible for his death and no one knows who actually killed him. Some of the blows were weak, some were strong, some were made by left-handers and some by right-handers.

Death penalty – If Casseti had been found guilty of kidnapping and murder in America he would have been given the death penalty which would have been death by electric chair. The 12 members of the Armstrong household deliver their own death penalty to Casseti when they stab him 12 times.

Armstrong Household Family Tree



Hector MacQueen – his father was the District Attorney in charge of the Casseti case.