

ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY *Ken Ludwig* DIRECTED BY *Peter Amster*

Agatha Christie's
**MURDER
ON THE
ORIENT
EXPRESS**

January 8 – March 8, 2020

asolorep _____
EDUCATION
& Engagement

Production Guide

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The More You Know: *Murder on the Orient Express*



PLAYWRIGHT: Ken Ludwig

Ken Ludwig is a two-time Olivier Award-winning playwright who has written over 28 plays and musicals, including 6 shows on Broadway and 7 on London's West End, which has cemented his place among the top tier of comedic writers. His first Broadway play, *Lend Me A Tenor*, won two Tony Awards. Ken was born in 1950 in York, Pennsylvania and graduated from Haverford College, where he majored in music. He would go on to study law at Harvard, but he couldn't seem to stay away from music, taking a master class with Leonard Bernstein in music composition while there, and went on to get another degree from Cambridge University. In 2014, Ken won a Falstaff Award for his book *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare* in the category of "Best Book, Publication, or Recording". His work has been performed in over 30 countries in more than 20 languages and is produced somewhere in the United States every night of the year.

AUTHOR: Dame Agatha Christie



Agatha Christie was born on September 15, 1890 in Torquay, England to a wealthy upper-middle-class family. Educated at home by her mother, Clara, Christie was encouraged to write - completing her first poem entitled "The Cowslip" at age 10. Christie became a volunteer nurse at a hospital in Torquay throughout the first World War, when her husband was stationed there, and eventually transitioned into a paid position as an apothecary's assistant. She published her first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, in 1920; the story focused on the murder of a rich heiress and introduced readers to one of Christie's most famous characters— Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. It was on a trip to the East where Christie met her second husband, a young archeologist 13 years her junior, to whom *Murder on the Orient Express* is dedicated. She frequently traveled with him and visited him at his dig sites which would help inform the setting for many of her future works. Her works have been translated into over 100 languages and estimates of her overall book sales range from 2-4 billion copies, putting her in league with Shakespeare's canon and the Bible for the most popular English publications of all time.

Authors' Bios sourced from: www.kenludwig.com and www.agathachristie.com

PRODUCTION STATS:

Playwright: Ken Ludwig
Based on the Book: *Murder on the Orient Express*
by Agatha Christie
Book Published: 1934
Premiere: New Jersey's
McCarter Theatre Center, March 2017
Film: Re-created for film multiple times including
the 1974 and 2017 motion pictures and the 2001
and 2010 television specials.

YOU SHOULD KNOW:

This play is one of the Top 10 Most-Produced plays of 2019-2020 as compiled by the Theatre Communications Group.

The Agatha Christie Estate contacted Ken Ludwig with a request to write this adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Poirot, the main character of this play, stars in 33 novels and 59 short stories and 1 original play by Agatha Christie

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Learn all about Agatha Christie:
<https://www.agathachristie.com/about-christie/christie-experts/john-curran-75-facts-about-christie>

Teacher lesson plans on the book:
<http://files.harpercollins.com/HarperAcademic/MurderOnTheOrientExpress.pdf>

History of the *Orient Express*:
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/true-history-of-the-orient-express-149702768/>

Documentary on the real *Orient Express*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Npl5fUx312Q>

Timeline of the Modern Mystery Novel

This timeline of the mystery genre gives you a general idea of where Christie came into the game and how she has impacted the genre. Her works start what we know as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, giving her the title “Queen of Crime.”

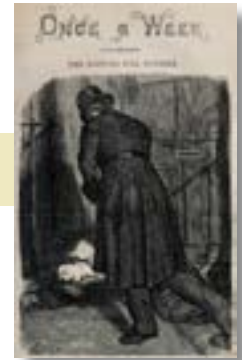
1841 “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” by Edgar Allan Poe. The creation of mysteries and the first fictional detective, August C. Dupin.

1853 *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens. First appearance of a detective in an English novel.

1864 *The Notting Hill Mystery*, by Charles Felix. Many consider this book to be the first true detective novel.

1887 *A Study in Scarlet*, by Arthur Conan Doyle. The first appearance of Sherlock Holmes.

1894 *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke: Lady Detective*, by C(atherine) L(ouisa) Pirkis. The first appearance of a woman detective written by a woman.



1920-1930 The Golden Age of Detective Fiction

1920 *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Agatha Christie's first mystery novel introducing Hercule Poirot is published.

1930 *The Secret of the Old Clock*. The Nancy Drew mysteries started the trend of mysteries for young adults.

1939 *And Then There Were None* is published and proves to be Agatha Christie's bestselling novel.

1952 *Casino Royale*, by Ian Fleming begins the mysteries of James Bond.

1969 *Scooby-Doo* debuts on television, featuring meddling kids solving mysteries.

1975 Hercule Poirot dies in the novel *Curtain* and receives an obituary in the *New York Times*.

1976 Agatha Christie dies at the age of 85.

1973 *Carrie*, by Stephen King, is published, starting King's fame in the mystery horror genre.

1982 *A is for Alibi* starts off Sue Grafton's mysteries that work their way through the alphabet. Her latest book on the letter X was published in 2015.

1990 The forensic mystery subgenre becomes popular due to television shows like *Law and Order*.

2010 *Sherlock Holmes* is wildly popular again due to the BBC version starring Benedict Cumberbatch.

2016 True crime podcasts like *Serial* and *My Favorite Murder* are at the height of popularity.

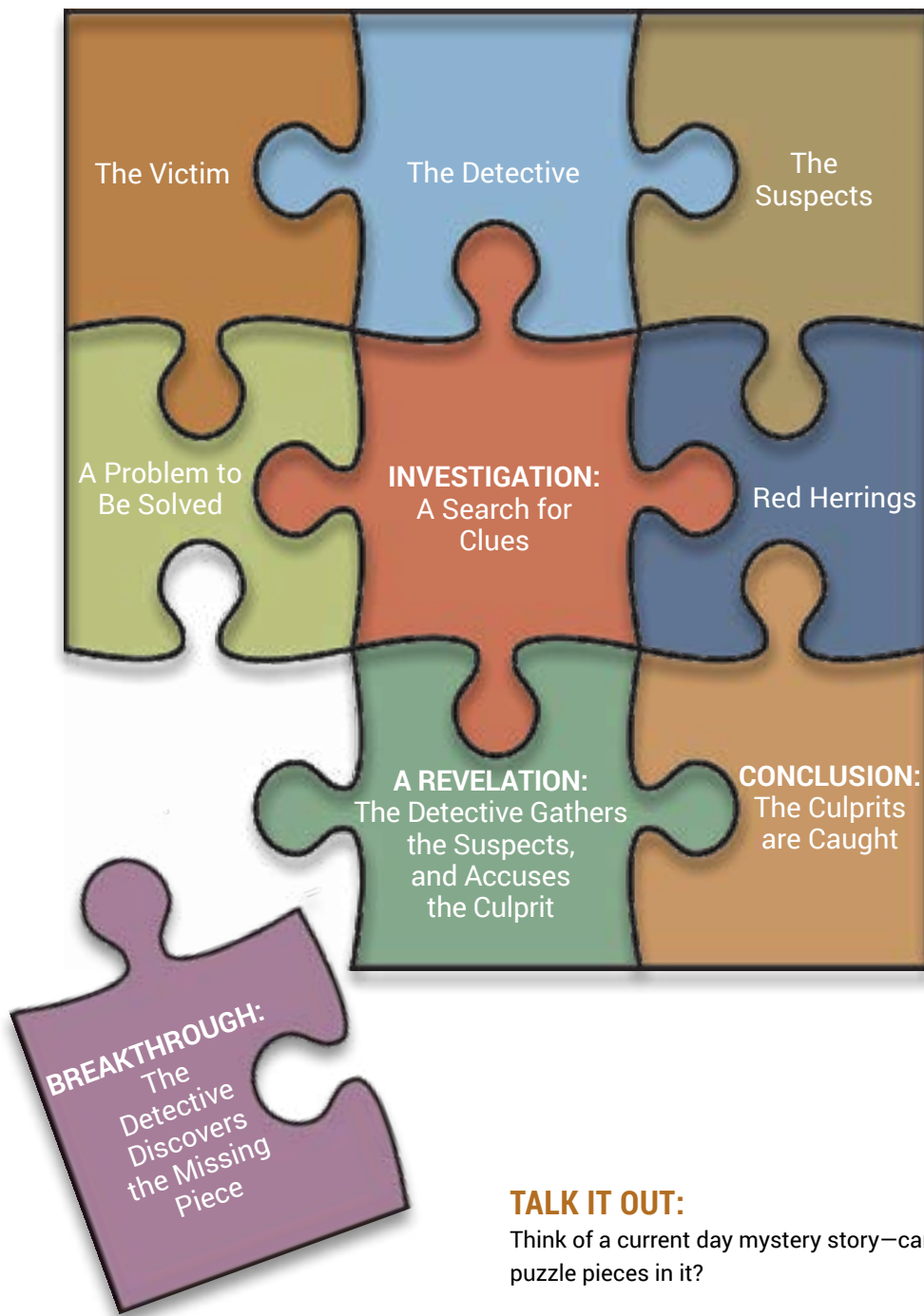


Educators: Use the activities and information on pages 3-5 to activate the genre of mystery and connect its history to our production.

Explorations for Everyone:

Puzzle Pieces Of Mystery

Agatha Christie created the pieces that make up the puzzle of modern mystery writing. Look over these pieces and answer the questions below as you discuss the genre.



FUN FACT
Agatha Christie is renowned as both a mystery novelist and playwright.

TALK IT OUT:

Think of a current day mystery story—can you identify these puzzle pieces in it?

- Do you see all of these pieces in *Murder on the Orient Express*?
- Do you think there are any missing pieces to this puzzle?
- What else do you feel is essential to the genre?

Classroom Connections:

Why So Mysterious?

Essential Question:

Why are people so drawn to mysteries?

Learning Objectives:

Identify and discuss why mystery is such an enduring genre.

Vocabulary:

Mystery, genre, convention

The popularity of the mystery genre (a category or style of literature) cannot be denied. Before seeing the show, set the tone with this classic theatre mystery game. Afterwards, have a group discussion about our fascination with mysteries.



TRY IT OUT:

Have all players sit in a circle with their eyes closed. Choose one person to be The Suspect by tapping them lightly on the shoulder as you walk around the circle.

Next, announce that the space has been transformed into the *Orient Express* and that there is a killer in their midst!

Have the students mingle and make small-talk as if they were aboard the train, but if The Suspect winks at them, they are to die. However, they must wait ten seconds before dying their most dramatic death.

If someone thinks they know who The Suspect is, they may raise their hand and make a guess. If they are wrong, they are out of the game. If they are right, they get to choose the next Suspect and the next mystery.

TALK IT OUT:

- Why are crime and mysteries so fascinating?
- What are the key conventions that make up a mystery?
- What are the different types of mystery?
- What are examples of the mystery genre in pop culture?
- Why do you think the mysteries of Agatha Christie are still popular today?
- Do you think mystery will still be a popular genre in the future? Why or why not?

Inspired by Adventure: Traveling in Style

The *Orient Express*, a luxury train that traveled across Europe from Istanbul to Paris, was a symbol of status for some and an aspiration for many. Even in 2020, it is difficult to travel from Paris to Istanbul without changing trains, stations, or rail companies. Imagine the appeal of a one-stop shop for such a long journey at the turn of the 20th century!

Royalty, nobles, diplomats, business people and the bourgeois were the most common travelers. Some of the most famous passengers included: Leo Tolstoy (writer), Leon Trotsky (anarchist), Sergei Diaghilev (choreographer), Marlene Dietrich (actress), Lawrence of Arabia (a famous military officer) and Mata Hari (spy).

This was a desirable journey not only due to the convenience and status it implied but because the train was fitted out to be a true luxury model with only the finest craftsmanship and exquisite attention to detail.



"The bright-white tablecloths and napkins, artistically and coquettishly folded by the sommeliers, the glittering glasses, the ruby red and topaz white wine, the crystal-clear water decanters and the silver capsules of the champagne bottles –they blind the eyes of the public both inside and outside."

—An Illustrated History of the Orient Express

FUN FACT

On an around-the-world book tour with her husband, Agatha Christie became one of the first English women to surf.

The Crime of the Century

The story within *Murder On the Orient Express* is inspired by the infamous kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby. On the night of March 1, 1932 a kidnapper climbed into the second-story nursery of the Lindbergh home and abducted the 20-month-old-son of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh. The only evidence discovered at the scene was an ransom note demanding \$50,000 and shards of a broken ladder. The search for baby Charles and the trial of his kidnapper captivated the world. Writer H.L. Mencken called this "The biggest story since the Resurrection." Christie, published *Murder On the Orient Express*, in 1934, the year the kidnapper was arrested. She borrowed the premise of this sensational news story for the crime in her novel.

To read more about this case check out the [FBI website](#).

TALK IT OUT:

The story of the Lindbergh baby does not have a happy ending. Although justice was considered served, with the arrest and subsequent conviction of Bruno Richard Hauptman, there are many questions still unanswered.

- Why do you think this was considered the "crime of the century?"
- How did the time period/rise of communication and media aid in this description?
- How do you approach difficult conversations in history, in our lives, and in literature?
- Why do you think these stories become cultural phenomena?

FUN FACT

Following the Lindbergh kidnapping in 1932, the Lindbergh Law was passed. This law increased the jurisdiction of the FBI and allowed them pursue kidnappers once they had crossed state lines with their victim. This was intended to make the search process quicker by avoiding the legalities that come up when dealing with multiple state law enforcement agencies.



Explorations for Everyone: Create Your Own Adventure

Essential Question: Where do authors get their inspiration?

Learning Objectives: Create a story by combining two unrelated topics.

Vocabulary: Premise, setting, inspiration, tag line

Murder on the Orient Express was inspired by a real life crime and Agatha Christie's travels. As you learn more about the inspirations for the source material create your own story structure using the template below.

FUN FACT

The Pera Palace Hotel in Istanbul has an Agatha Christie Room where, it claims, she wrote *Murder on the Orient Express*.

READ ABOUT IT:

THE MYSTERY: *Murder on the Orient Express*, opens with young Daisy Armstrong's kidnapping. Christie based this major plot point on the 1932 Lindbergh kidnapping. See the blurb on the previous page for the back story of this crime.

THE SETTING: Many believe that Christie was inspired by her own journey aboard the *Orient Express* in 1928. On her journey, Christie was delayed about 24 hours due to heavy rain. This situation was the spark that inspired the setting for her mystery. See the previous page for more about this luxury train.

TRY IT OUT:

NEWS STORY: Choose a local news event that is important to you or that you are intrigued by	JOURNEY: Think about a journey or trip that you have recently taken. This could have been a grand European tour or a simple trip to the grocery store.
What happened?	What happened?
Why does this story resonate with you?	Why does this journey resonate with you?
What set it apart from others?	What sets it apart from others?

BRAINSTORM: How might you combine these two unrelated events?

Come up with a title for your new story:

Write a tag line for your story

A tagline is a short text that distills the idea of the story in a catchy way. For example, *Spider-man's* tagline is "With great power comes great responsibility."

BONUS: Create a movie poster or book jacket for your story. Or take this brilliant idea and write the whole story out!

Classroom Connection: Design Your World

Essential Question: How does a designer create an environment on stage for a specific historical and physical setting?

Learning Objectives: Explore the challenges a scenic designer faces through creative problem solving and research.

Vocabulary: Setting, design, rendering, historical period

For this show, Asolo's scenic designer Paul Tate DePoo III was presented with the design challenge of creating an ornate train from the early 1930s. Use this activity to start exploring the challenges and possibilities that a designer might face when working on a show with a unique historical and physical setting.

THINK IT OUT: DESIGN INSPIRATION

One of a designer's first steps for a historical play is finding research that will build the world of the story. This research might include: the script, time period, and the location.

Read: The first place a designer refers to is the script. Here they search for any lines with information about the setting and mood that they will need to have in the design. Look over this quote from *Monsieur Bouc* about the *Orient Express* and think about these questions:

- What words in this quote tell you about the environment?
- Put your design cap on: how do you bring those words and the mood that they evoke to life visually?

"It is not a mere train that will carry you tonight, it is a legend. It runs like no other vehicle on the earth. The fittings are from Paris, the paneling, Venice, the plates are from Rome and the taps from New York. The best food, the best beds, the best pillows, the best feathers inside the pillows. It is poetry on wheels, and Lord Byron himself could not write it better. Monsieur, prepare yourself. In one hour, I will meet you on the platform of the Orient Express." —*Monsieur Bouc*

Research Time Period: The designer needs to know information about the time period so that their work looks authentic and reflects the era to the audience. This show takes place in the early 1930s. During this time Art Deco was a visual and design style that could be seen everywhere from architecture to fashion. Check out the information and images of Art Deco inspiration on the next page.

Research Visuals: The last chunk of research a designer might do is on the specific location itself. This show takes place aboard a Pullman Train. Check out the information and images of Pullman Trains on the next page.

TALK IT OUT:

Generate Challenges: Come up with a list of the challenges and creative possibilities a designer might encounter when designing a historical train for the stage. For example: How do you show the movement of the train? You can see the rendering of the scenic design below for some guidance on how our designer set about answering these challenges.

TRY IT OUT:

Walk through the initial design process yourself with a new setting and time period.

Choose a Setting: First, choose one of these historical settings to research and design. A musical is paired with each location if you want to use that as the show you are designing for.

A PLAY OR MUSICAL SET IN:

- A Soda Shop (*Grease*)
- A Covered Wagon (*The Little House on the Prairie*)
- A Sewer (*Guys and Dolls*)
- A Cruise Ship (*Anything Goes*)
- A Gold Mine (*Paint Your Wagon*)
- A Big Top Circus Tent (*Side Show*)

Research: Do some research on the historical time period of your setting. Create an image board and answer questions like the ones on the next page.

Brainstorm: Think about the design challenges and possibilities you will encounter when creating this scenic design.

BONUS: The last representation that the designer creates is called a rendering. Create your own rendering of the above design challenge. You could do this by drawing, creating a collage, sculpting, or using a digital platform.

Scenic design rendering by Paul Tate DePoo III



Inspiration Board

Art Deco

A popular design style of the 1920s and 1930s characterized especially by bold outlines, geometric and zigzag forms, and the use of new materials (such as plastic).



What common themes do you see?



What about these images sparks your imagination?

What elements of this time period do you see reflected in these inspiration images? In the scenic rendering?

Pullman Trains

Train travel at the time, while unquestionably the most efficient and reliable way to cover long distances, was generally cramped, bumpy, and uncomfortable. The Pullman Train changed this in 1859, adding larger washrooms and compartments, sleeper compartments, higher ceilings, and a generally more refined and elegant feel.



What elements of the historical trains do you see in the scenic rendering? On the stage?

What do you see that is unique about this type of train?



What elements of the time period do you see?

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES AT ASOLO REP

Into the Breeches! Student Matinee

Tuesday, February 18

10:15AM | \$10 student tickets

Includes an interactive classroom workshop prior to your performance date, and a post-show Q&A with cast members. Recommended for grades 6 and up. Request a performance at: asolorep.org/engage-learn/school-programs/student-matinees

Snow White Family Show at Asolo Rep

June 11–28

Family Packages Available

The New International Encounter brings this modern dark fairy tale all the way from Europe. The actors play multiple roles and instruments as they give this classic fairy tale a new twist! This 21st-Century *Snow White* is incredibly fresh, and at the same time delightfully familiar.

Family Day for Snow White

Saturday, June 20

12:30PM Pre-show activities

2PM Matinee Performance

See this innovative and modern fairy tale with friends and family. Special pre-show activities welcome the young and the young-at-heart. Family ticket packages are available through the Asolo Rep Box Office: 941-351-8000 for details.

Youth Pass for 2019-20 Season

NOW AVAILABLE! | \$35 for full-time students 25 and younger. Receive one ticket to each 2019-20 **Asolo Rep and FSU/Asolo Conservatory** performances for last-minute, best-available seating, subject to availability. Call the Box Office at 941-351-8000 or online: asolorep.org/youthpass

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www.asolorep.org/engage-learn/school-programs/classroom-resources

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Murder on the Orient Express 10

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*in memoriam

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