

# British Mystery Stories and Novels: A Misjudge of Character

## Summer Reading Club—Syllabus

### Schole and St. Raphael School

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Dates: June 21–July 21 (10 sessions)

Time: Section 1: T/Th 11 a.m.-12 p.m.

Section 2: 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Schoology access code:



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#### Description:

Have you ever misjudged someone? Have you ever started out thinking someone was one type of person and they eventually turned out to be entirely different than you first thought—sometimes for the better, and sometimes for the worse? For that matter, what makes us humans behave the way we do? What makes some people choose destructive behaviors that destroys their own lives and the lives of everyone around them? Finally what causes some people to commit a crime or even to do something so sinister as to take another human life? These are the questions explored in the pages of mystery novels, with the very best writers causing us to ponder the mystery of human nature itself. They challenge us as readers to look at our own biases, where oftentimes the person most liable to commit a crime turns out innocent and the person least likely has been deceptively guilty all along. The British Mystery Novels summer book club will be tackling these questions by diving into four classic texts of the genre—all of them different books from the first time we held this club two years ago. Using the works of renowned mystery writers (Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L Sayers, and Ellis Peters) we will explore our tendency to misjudge people and assess how skilled writers are able to shape a compelling and believable mystery plot. Come join us this summer and help us solve each case!

Texts:

*The Sign of Four* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

*And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie

*Unnatural Death* (Lord Peter Wimsey Mysteries #3) by Dorothy L. Sayers

*A Morbid Taste For Bones* (The Cadfael Chronicles #1) by Ellis Peters

Reading Schedule	<b>NOTE: this schedule may need to be adjusted as we go. Assume that at the beginning of each week will wrap up our discussion of the previous book as we begin the new one.</b>
June 21	Come to first session with chps 1-3 of <i>The Sign of Four</i> read.
June 23	<i>The Sign of Four</i> chps. 4-8
June 28	<i>The Sign of Four</i> chps. 9-12
June 30	<i>Unnatural Death</i> Part 1
July 5	<i>Unnatural Death</i> Part 2
July 7	<i>Unnatural Death</i> Part 3
July 12	<i>And Then There Were None</i> chps 1-9
July 14	<i>And Then There Were None</i> chps 10-epilogue
July 19	<i>A Morbid Taste For Bones</i> : chps 1-6
July 21	<i>A Morbid Taste For Bones</i> : chps 7-11

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#### **Beginning questions:**

What is everyone's experience of mystery stories? Are you completely new to them, have you read them before, or do you mostly watch mysteries on TV or film?  
What do you consider to be your favorite mysteries story or series?

#### **A few questions about mystery stories to get our discussions going:**

- What characteristics make for a good detective or crime solver? What kinds of weaknesses or vices do they carry with them? Are they independent professional detectives, official police detectives, or lay people who always find themselves in the midst of being called upon to solve a crime
- Does an iconic crime solver also need a faithful sidekick? Do the series without sidekicks work just as well as those with them, not as well, or better? What characteristics make for a good sidekick?
- Can we observe the structure of a great mystery plot? How can it be broken up into sections? What makes for a successful mystery plot? Do we want it to follow an established formula, to play around with an established formula, or to create its own formula? Some mysteries take place in a concentrated amount of time, whereas others are spread out over several months. Observe the differences between these two types.
- Can you figure out the ending before it happens? (Without looking!) And do we even want to? Do we want to be left in the dark until the very end about how the case is solved or do we want to know just enough info to figure it out step by step? Also, if the explanation of the crime is confusing or illogical (and with lots of plot holes) can it be considered a good mystery story?
- How does geography and landscape as well as the different regions and cultures of Britain factor into our stories. What do you learn about the different pockets and dialects of the people? To what extent does the land itself as a character in these stories?
- Do the characters in our books or you as the reader ever misjudge the characters, where you thought someone was good and they end up being bad, or the opposite ends up being true? Why do you think we so easily misjudge people?

#### **Further optional assignments:**

- Watch one or more of the television or film adaptations based on one of our books or another British mystery TV show or film. Report back and share your thoughts about the adaptation or story. How does it compare to what we've read and how are written mystery stories different than those told in a visual medium. Please only watch programs that align with either your personal or family standards for what is appropriate.
- Find and read an article or book on mystery writing and share with us what insights you've learned and if our books adhere the recommendations being given in them.
- If you have the time, write your own mystery story and share it with the class.

#### **Keep calm and do something British (a fun activity):**

On your own time, but over the course of the book club, engage in something quintessentially British, as either mentioned in our books or another custom you know about. Have some British tea (and at tea time!), make a proper roast dinner (with Yorkshire pudding!), go for a long walk across the countryside, or look on the calendar and celebrate the closest British holiday. You could also throw a British themed party. Whatever you decide have some good olde Anglo-Saxon fun with your family! (By the way, you are free to engage in Scottish, Welsh, and Irish traditions as well!)