

British Mystery Novels: It's Always Who You Least Expect Summer Reading Club—Syllabus

Schole and St. Raphael School

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Dates: June 20–July 25 (10 sessions)

Times: T/Th 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
T/Th 2:00-3:00 p.m.



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ELIGIBLE STUDENTS: Grades 7 - 12 grade (Middle and High School)

Description:

You are invited to join this year's British Mystery Novels summer book club! It will again feature four classic works by the mystery genre's most revered authors. After jaunting through a few of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock stories, we will read the first Lord Peter Wimsey mystery featuring Harriet Vane, the well-known Hercule Poirot mystery *Death on the Nile*, and then wrap up with another Medieval mystery solved by the Benedictine monk Brother Cadfael. The theme for this year's book club is "It's Always Who You Least Expect," because you never can quite tell who committed the crime until the very last moment. Whether you are a veteran detective or a novice crime solver we would love for you to join us this summer and help us solve each case!

Texts: (Note: any version of these texts is acceptable, especially since there are so many editions of them)

Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories Volume 1 (Bantam Classics) or *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Death on the Nile by Agatha Christie

Strong Poison (Lord Peter Wimsey Mysteries #5) by Dorothy L. Sayers

One Corpse Too Many (The Cadfael Chronicles #2) by Ellis Peters

Reading Schedule	<i>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.</i>
June 20	Come to first session having read "A Scandal in Bohemia"
June 22	"The Red-headed League" and "A Case of Identity" In class we will start to read "The Boscombe Valley Mystery"
June 27	"The Boscombe Valley Mystery," "The Five Orange Pips," and chapters 1-2 of <i>Strong Poison</i>
June 29	<i>Strong Poison</i> chapters 3-8
July 6	<i>Strong Poison</i> chapters 9-23 (Note: we will be skipping class for the July 4 holiday)
July 11	<i>Death on the Nile</i> chapters 1-10
July 13	<i>Death on the Nile</i> chapters 11-18
July 18	<i>Death on the Nile</i> chapters 19-31
July 20	<i>One Corpse Too Many</i> : chapters 1-6
July 25	<i>One Corpse Too Many</i> : chapters 7-12

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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!)