

A Mystery of Her Own

Have you ever read a book by Agatha Christie? If so, you are not alone. In fact, Agatha Christie is the best-selling novelist of all time. Only the Bible and Shakespeare's plays have sold more copies. As of 2020, Agatha's books had sold 200 billion copies and been translated into over 100 languages. Her play, *The Mousetrap*, was the longest running play in history. That's quite a claim to fame!

Agatha Christie was born in England in 1890. When she was young, she read with her mother every afternoon. Little Agatha liked to think of alternative story endings, especially for detective stories, which were her favorites.

During World War I, Agatha worked as a nurse and dispensed medicines at a hospital. She learned a lot about poisons from her job, which later informed her writing. In her first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the murder victim dies from strychnine poisoning. In *Appointment with Death*, the culprit is digitalis from the foxglove plant. "Give me a decent bottle of poison, and I'll construct the perfect crime," Agatha reportedly said.

Agatha Christie invented several detectives to star in her novels and solve her imaginative crimes. Two of her most well-known characters are Hercule Poirot, a savvy Belgian detective, and Miss Marple, an observant

grandmotherly figure. Some readers think that Miss Marple is autobiographical. These characters appear in many of her books and can also be seen in countless adaptations for television, stage, and film.

The mysteries surrounding Agatha Christie didn't only happen in her books. In 1926, Agatha disappeared for 11 days. Over 1,000 police officers and hundreds more private citizens were involved in the search for the mystery writer. They even used dogs and airplanes to look for her. Her car was found nearby, but there was no sign of Agatha.

Eventually Agatha was located at a health spa in the vicinity. Her husband reported that she temporarily lost her memory, but no one really knows what actually happened. Some people said that they saw Agatha dressed as a man in London, and further speculation suggested that she had joined a murder investigation in the city. Others said that she was unhappy and ran away from her home, given the content of letters that she sent to her loved ones. Still others guessed that she disappeared purposely, as a publicity stunt. Theories abound, but Agatha never spoke publicly about what went on during those 11 days.

Agatha wrote 66 books before her death in 1976. To honor her contribution to literature, she was made a Dame. She was also the first recipient of the Mystery Writers of America's Grand Master Award. Her work lives on and is still being read and adapted today.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Agatha Christie's first book was called: (Literal)
 - a. Appointment with Death
 - b. Sparkling Cyanide
 - c. The Mysterious Affair at Styles
 - d. The Mousetrap

2. By 2020, Agatha Christie's books had sold over _____ copies. (Literal)
 - a. 100 million
 - b. 200 billion
 - c. 200 million
 - d. 100 billion

3. Why do you think Agatha invented a character like Miss Marple?
(Inferential)
 - a. She wanted to create a character like herself.
 - b. She was bored of Hercule Poirot.
 - c. She liked grandmothers.
 - d. Her favorite food was maple syrup.

4. Which of the following true facts about Agatha Christie can we *not* infer from the passage? (Inferential)
 - a. She had an interest in chemistry, medicines, and poisons.
 - b. She wanted to be an author from an early age.
 - c. She was a private person and didn't like to talk about her personal life.
 - d. She loved to travel.

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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