

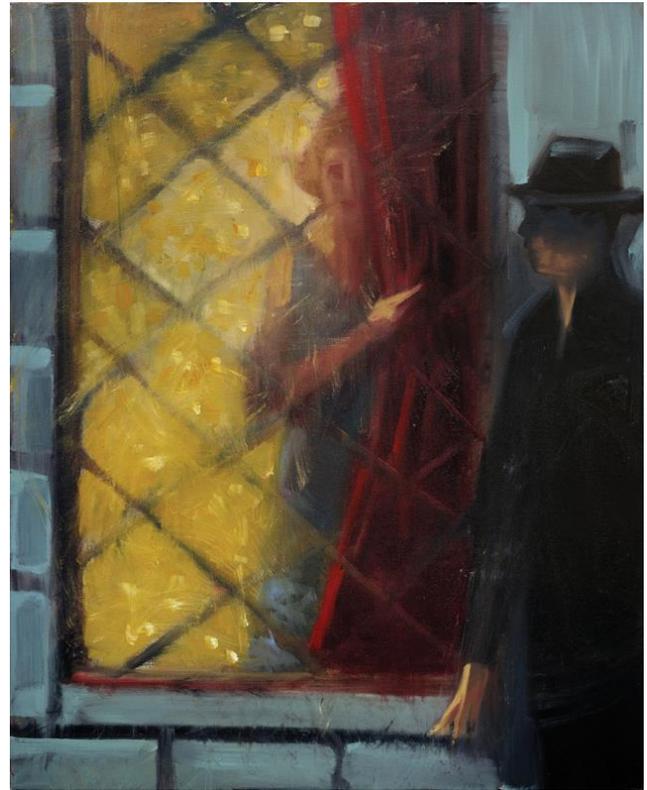


INDIANA  
REPERTORY  
THEATRE

# The Mousetrap

by Agatha Christie

April 26 – May 22, 2016  
on the One America Mainstage



## STUDY GUIDE

edited by Richard J Roberts  
with contributions by Janet Allen, Courtney Sale  
Robert M. Koharchik, Alison Heryer, Michelle Habeck, David Dabbon

Indiana Repertory Theatre  
140 West Washington Street • Indianapolis, Indiana 46204  
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# ***The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie**

Welcome to the classic Agatha Christie mystery thriller: a houseful of strangers trapped by a blizzard and stalked by an unknown murderer. *The Mousetrap* is the world's longest running stage play, celebrating its 64th year in 2016. Part drawing room comedy and part murder mystery, this timeless chiller is a double-barreled whodunit full of twists and surprises.

Student Matinees at 10:00 A.M. on April 28, May 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12

Estimated length: 2 hours, 15 minutes, with one intermission

Recommended for grades 7-12 due to mild language

## **Themes & Topics**

Development of Genre      Deceit and Disguise  
Gender and Conformity      Xenophobia or Fear of the Other  
Logic Puzzles

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# Secrets

by Courtney Sale, director

What draws us in to the murder mystery? There is something primal yet modern about the circumstances and the settings of Agatha Christie's stories. We take for granted the pervasiveness of the tropes of the murder mystery, while perhaps subconsciously allowing them to wedge their way deep into our psyche.



Agatha Christie

The detective story is not quite 175 years old. Early stories drew their inspiration from real people and real cases of elusive solutions to ghastly crimes. The root of Agatha Christie's work is found in the awakening of progressive ideas of the nineteenth century. The detective arose during this time as the "scientist" of crime; deductive reasoning based on collective evidence eventually led to modern criminology. The British public was drawn to these stories of murder in the broadsheets. In speaking of the detective or "enigma" stories of his day, Henry James said, "they dealt with those most mysterious mysteries, the mysteries that are at our own doors ... the terrors of the cheerful country house." Such secrets up until this time would have been singularly undisclosed, covered up. Perhaps the people of England understood the uncovered side of crimes as they did their own secrets.

Sigmund Freud's work in psychology enriched Arthur Conan Doyle's creation Sherlock Holmes, adding to the murder mystery not only brilliantly deduced evidence, but assessment of the suspects based on deeper and darker motives. All of these antecedents influence our dear Agatha Christie, who continued working with these themes throughout her career, including *The Mousetrap*.

The typical Agatha Christie story brings a group of suspects to a far-flung or unreachable location for mundane reasons. The audience is brought together in a similar way. We are live witnesses to the actions, at least temporarily disconnected from our modern distractions. We will not leave until the case has been solved. Of course, *The Mousetrap* is also great fun and a delicious mystery. Join us in our snowbound country home, and bask in the mystery.

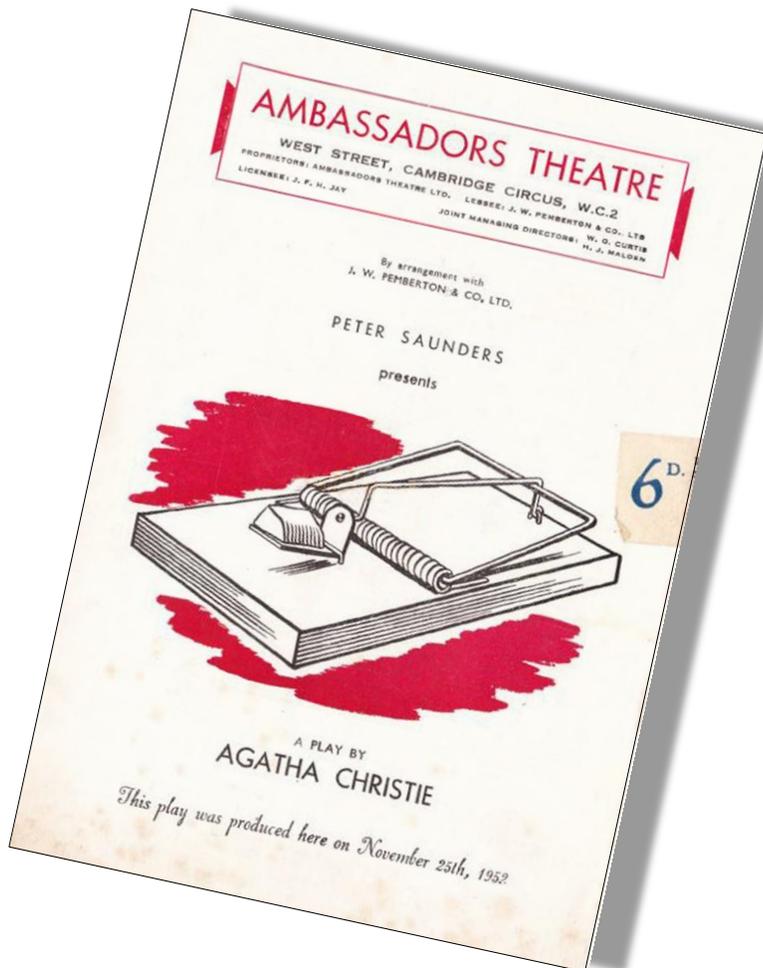
# Making Mystery

by Janet Allen, Executive Artistic Director

Perhaps the grandest part of the production of *The Mousetrap* that you are about to see is the amazing artists making it. There are many wonderful collaborations and immense talents at work on this production. If that idea, surprises you, given the popularity of the form, it speaks to our purpose: not only do we make a variety of work across many different styles and genres in a given season, but we craft each production with exquisite care and finesse, beginning with who's making it.

Leading the charge on *The Mousetrap* is our amazing associate artistic director, Courtney Sale. This is Courtney's last directing project in that role, as she moves on to become the artistic director of Seattle Children's Theatre this summer. Courtney's directing work here at the IRT has spanned across many genres. This season she has so far helmed *April 4, 1968* (a new play) and *A Christmas Carol* (our most populist production); in past seasons she has done work for our youth audience (*The Giver*, *And Then They Came for Me*) as well as the reality-expanding *The Mountaintop*. So she brings a wide cross-section of experience to this beloved

Agatha Christie murder mystery. She also brings laser-like focus to detail, and has drawn, as you will see, from the design team, some very big statements that ground the production in a style, place, time period, and that most ephemeral of all design elements, an environment of fear and suspicion! Thanks, Courtney, for this wonderful production, and for all the wonderful productions you've made for IRT audiences of all ages.



*An original London program book.*



*The original 1952 cast of The Mousetrap at the Ambassadors Theatre in London's West End.*

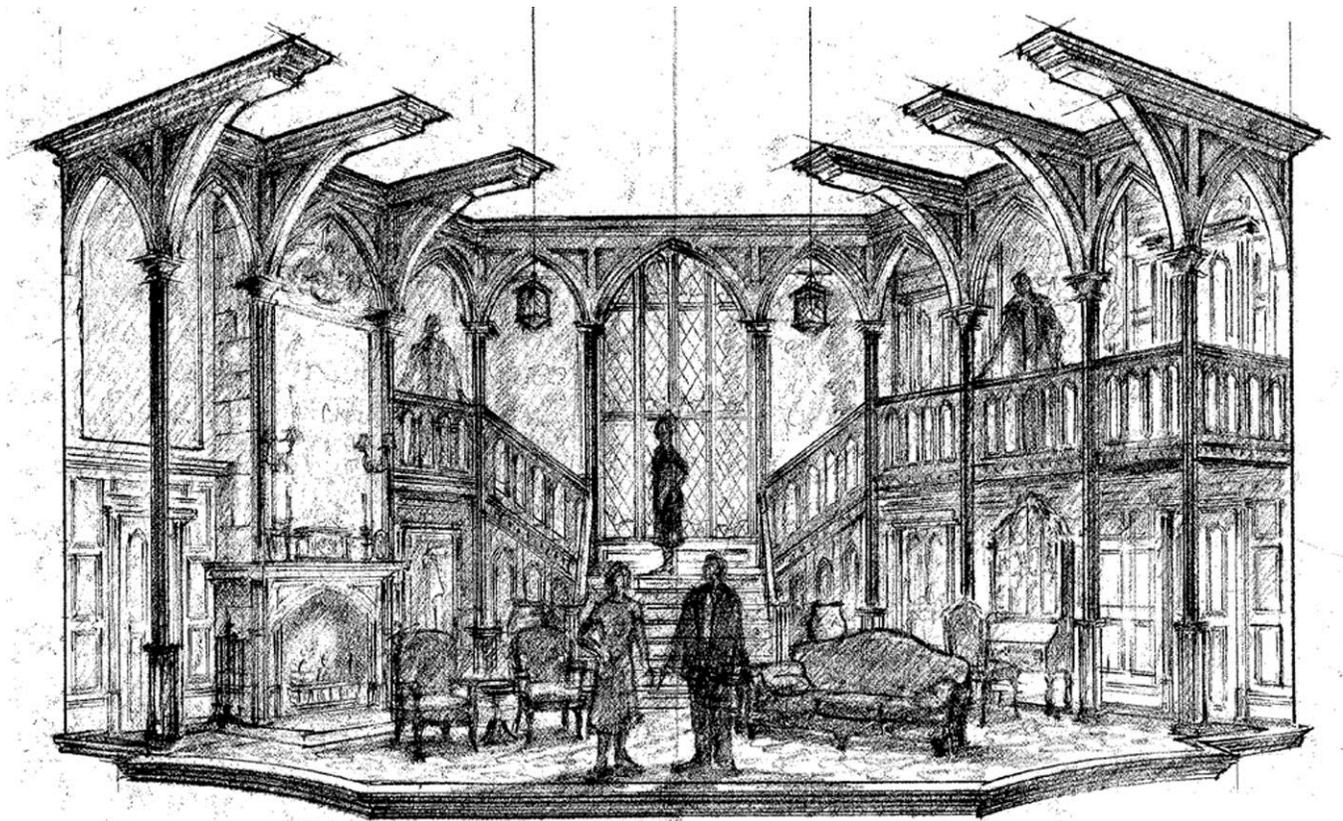
We are especially proud of the acting ensemble we have gathered for this production, from both coasts and lots of places in between! It takes a particular kind of exploration of nuance to do this work, and an enthusiasm for finding mystery in characters, things that create disquiet but not confusion, suspicion but not guilt, possibility but not confirmation. Actors must be very specific in their gestural language, because an audience is reading meaning into every flick of a newspaper, every turn of a head, every eye movement. One of Agatha Christie's greatest achievements, and a big part of her enduring stage popularity, is the great palette she created for actors to explore. We are lucky to have brought prodigious power into this acting company, with actors bringing their best chops to this mysterious romp.

As we end IRT's 44th season, and look ahead to its 45th, we want to thank all of you gathered here: the makers, the viewers, the facilitators, the critics, the enthusiasts, the newcomers, and the practiced. It is the collision of all those human forces in a room that makes a piece of living art spring to life: there's nothing virtual, it's all real, and it's made for you!

# Murder at Monkswell Manor

**Robert M. Koharchik** Scenic Designer

Inspired by research of English manor houses and *Downton Abbey*, this design was created to capture the essence of the great halls in those historic homes, supplying as much detail and grandeur as possible. A Gothic style, complete with stone walls and dark heavy wood tones, was chosen both to reference the history of Monkswell Manor when it was an abbey and to help establish a foreboding atmosphere for the play.



*Scenic drawing by designer Robert M. Koharchik.*

**Michelle Habeck** Lighting Designer

Lighting for performance and place requires an invisible intuition into the nature of the human experience. We must see light where there is emotion. We must craft shadow from conflict, and we must make epic the mundane. We shape, we carve, we reveal, and we hide. We give glimpse to matter. We give meaning to that which is present before us. We create a reality that simultaneously is both true and false. *The Mousetrap* offers a stealthily enigmatic and heart-quickenning midwinter adventure. You never know what you might see, what you might hear, or who exactly you are in the company of. All those who love a great mystery know that attentions must be kept. Enjoy.



**Alison Heryer** Costume Designer

Agatha Christie gives us so many great characters in *The Mousetrap*. In this production, the way the characters wear their clothing becomes just as important as the individual garments themselves. For this reason we looked at lots of photographs from the period to try to find each character's real life counterpart. While everyone's clothing draws on 1950s British fashion, we wanted to find styling choices that celebrate individual quirks and eccentricities. We also developed a backstory for each character. Imagining a history that can be told in the clothing and styling of each look adds a layer of authenticity to the design.

*Renderings  
for Molly (left) and  
Detective Sergeant Trotter  
(right) by costume designer  
Alison Heryer.*



**David Dabbon** Composer

Let's play a game! How does the music in the show make you feel? Does it guide you to be scared? confused? suspicious? to laugh? There is something thrilling about the combination of comedy and suspense. They are a pair I would not have put together, but that I thoroughly enjoy seeing. Both in film and on stage, music guides how we as an audience should or would want to feel. As you go on the adventure of this show, notice the emotional roller-coaster we take you on. There is a theme that Agatha suggests in the script that I use in different ways. How is it used as part of the action, verses underscoring for a scene? How does the music in the show make you feel?

# Playwright Agatha Christie

Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was born in 1890 in Torquay, Devonshire, England. Her father was American, her mother English. As a child Agatha never attended school. Shy and unable to express her feelings, she first turned to music as a means of expression and, later in life, to writing. Her father taught her arithmetic, but her mother believed education destroyed the brain and ruined the eyes. She taught Agatha history and what she called “general knowledge.” The house was filled with books and newspapers, and Agatha and her older brother and sister were encouraged to read and write.

When Agatha was 11, her father died. Despite financial difficulties, Agatha’s mother maintained the family’s genteel facade and continued Agatha’s eclectic education. She took Swedish exercise classes and studied the piano, singing, and dancing. At 16, she began two years of finishing school in Paris, where she learned French and German and took gymnastics and tennis lessons. Her mother wanted Agatha to be a concert pianist or an opera singer, but stage fright and shyness prevented her from pursuing a career in music.



Agatha’s mother developed health problems and decided that a warmer climate might be beneficial. When Agatha returned from France, her mother took her to Egypt for three months. There was a small English colony there, and Agatha could make her social debut more cheaply than in London. Thus began Agatha’s lifelong fascination with the Middle East. Upon returning to England, Agatha met Lieutenant Archibald Christie of the Royal Field Artillery. After a two-year engagement, Agatha and Archie were married in 1914.



During World War I, the new Mrs. Christie signed on as a nurse at a Red Cross hospital near her mother in Torquay. Promoted to the dispensary, she trained for the apothecaries' exam, learning all about drugs and poisons. This newly acquired knowledge inspired her to try her hand at a murder mystery.

In 1919, Christie gave birth to her only child, Rosalind, named after Shakespeare's heroine. In 1920 her first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was published. This was the world's first introduction to Christie's Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot. In 1922 Christie published her second book, beginning a book-a-year pattern. Her name appeared on the best-seller lists the rest of her life.

In 1926 Christie published what some consider her masterpiece, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. That same year, her mother died after a severe illness. While still mourning, Christie found out that her husband was having an affair with a younger woman. Shortly thereafter, Christie disappeared for eleven days. When found, she claimed amnesia, and the mystery remains unsolved.

Christie divorced her husband and went to southern Iraq to join an archaeological dig. There she met Max Mallowan, an archaeological assistant who would eventually become one of the most prominent archaeologists of his generation. The two were completely unlike in background, education, profession, and age—she was 40, he was 26—but they recognized that they complemented each other, and they married in 1930. That same year, Christie published her first Miss Marple novel, *The Murder at the Vicarage*; and she premiered her first play, *Black Coffee*, at the Embassy Theatre in London's West End.

Throughout the 1930s, Agatha accompanied Max on his archaeological digs, taking her portable typewriter along. She told reporters: “An archaeologist is the best husband any woman can have. The older she gets, the more interested he is in her.” Christie always made use of her travels in her novels, such as *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *Death on the Nile* (1937). In 1939 she published her most popular book, *Ten Little Indians* (also known as *And Then There Were None*).

During World War II, Christie lived in London, serving as a dispenser at University College Hospital. Between 1940 and 1945, she published ten new novels and adapted two earlier novels for the stage, including *Ten Little Indians*. She also wrote “final” books for the Poirot and Miss Marple series; these were to be kept in her publisher’s vault and not to be published until after her death.

After the war, Christie and Max continued to travel together. She gained further success on the stage and in the cinema. *The Mousetrap* opened in London in 1952; it is still running today, 64 years later, making it the longest running play in the world. *Witness for the Prosecution* opened in London in 1953; Billy Wilder adapted and directed the 1957 film starring Charles Laughton and Marlene Dietrich.

Christie was named a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1971. In 1972, she broke her leg and experienced heart trouble that required considerable bed rest. She continued writing, producing new mysteries regularly every year to 1973. Her last public appearance was in 1974 at the opening of the movie version of her novel *Murder on the Orient Express*. The success of that film prompted her to release the final Poirot book she had written 30 years earlier, *Curtains*.



Dame Agatha died peacefully in Wallingford in 1976. She was buried in the country churchyard of Cholsey Parish near her home. A few months later, *Sleeping Murder*, the final Miss Marple novel, was published. The author had always claimed she was not very fond of Hercule Poirot, and she had killed him off in his final book; but Miss Marple lived on.

# Ten Commandments for Writing Detective Fiction

Ronald Knox was a mystery writer in the early part of the 20th century who belonged to the Detection Club, a society peopled by such legendary mystery writers as Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, G. K. Chesterson, and E. C. Bentley. His list was published in the preface to *Best Detective Stories of 1928-29*, which he edited.

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

# The Queen of Crime, the Duchess of Death

Agatha Christie is the world's best known writer of mystery fiction. She wrote some 80 books and 19 plays, and her work has been translated into 103 languages. More than 150 movies and television programs have been adapted from her works.

In the golden age of the English detective story, Christie was the genre's leading author. The years between the two World Wars were times of great change in Britain. A depression crippled the economy. The nation's dominance as a global empire was crumbling. Moral standards, social customs, and hemlines were changing. The wealthy found it increasingly difficult to hire household servants, and ever more challenging to afford those they could find.

Christie wrote of a stable, serene, old-fashioned world that readers fondly recognized: elegant country houses located in quaint rural villages were populated by large extended families and close-knit communities of quirky, eccentric characters. Class distinctions were clearly maintained. Christie's work avoided politics and other controversial topics, focusing on the niceties of social interaction and good manners. The intrusion of a murder into such portraits of stability and comfort only added to the appeal. The victim often turned out to be a disagreeable person who would not be missed, while the careful deduction of clues and the ultimate arrest of the murderer reinforced the propriety and stability of the social system. Christie's books allowed readers to feel as if they were exercising their brains while being entertained. If the careful reader, studying the clues, guessed the solution, he was proud of himself; if not, he was impressed by the author. Either way, the reader had a good time.

Christie's characters were usually well-to-do; if their comfortable lifestyle was undermined by financial problems, it often led to murder. Although her villains may have used extremely complicated plans, they were not impossible fictions, but were firmly grounded in everyday

reality. Christie's world view was conservative and rational, but there was always a place for accidents. In 1937's *Dumb Witness*, she wrote, "Does it not strike you that the *easiest* way of removing someone you want to remove from your path is to take advantage of *accident*? Accidents are happening all the time. And sometimes—they can be helped to happen!"



*Joan Hickson as Miss Marple in the PBS series.*

*David Suchet as  
Hercule Poirot  
in the PBS series.*

Long after Christie's death, science fiction writer Brian Aldiss revealed that Christie once told him that she wrote her books up to the last chapter, and then decided who the least likely suspect was. She would then go back and make the necessary changes to "frame" that person. Christie was particularly renowned for her surprise "twist" endings.



Christie's greatest creation was the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, whom she featured in 40 novels. She also wrote 17 novels featuring Miss Jane Marple, an elderly spinster. Where Poirot's detective skills focused on logic and rational thinking, Miss Marple relied on her feminine sensitivity and empathy to solve crimes. Miss Marple was a typically English character, a lifelong resident of the village of St. Mary Mead. Neither Poirot nor Marple had any family life, but Poirot traveled a great deal. A former policeman, he had been forced to flee his native Belgium after the German invasion in 1914. Both characters were eccentric, but while Poirot was exotic and amusing with his egotism and his waxed moustache, Miss Marple was as comfortable and endearing as an old friend. She is thought to have been based on the author's grandmother. Christie is the only mystery writer to have created not one but two major detective figures.

Christie always gave a logical explanation for the crimes her villains committed, but she did not blame society: murder was not a sign of the degeneration of middle-class values. After the crime was solved, life continued happily. As her writing career continued over six decades, she remained aware of social change. "When I re-read those first books," she said in 1966, "I'm amazed at the number of *servants* drifting around. And nobody is really doing any work, they're always having tea on the lawn."

Agatha Christie is the best-selling novelist of all time, with a billion copies sold in English and another billion in other languages. She is the most widely published novelist of all time in any language, out-sold only by Shakespeare and the Bible. As the *New York Times Book Review* said, Christie "entertained more people for more hours at a time than any other writer of her generation."

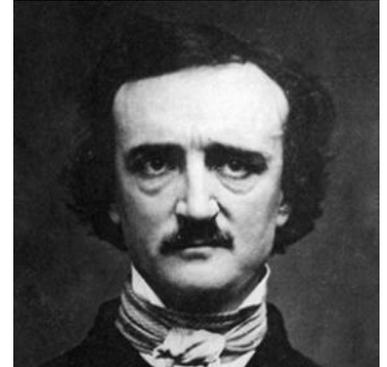
# Discovering More Detective Fiction

Besides Agatha Christie, here are a few of the best writers in the genre:

## **Edgar Allan Poe** (1809-1849)

Best known for his tales of the macabre and mystery, Poe was one of the early American practitioners of the short story. His classic "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) is considered one of the first detective stories.

*Edgar Allen Poe*



## **Arthur Conan Doyle** (1859-1930)

Scottish author most noted for his four novels and fifty-six short stories about the detective Sherlock Holmes, which are generally considered a major innovation in the field of crime fiction. A brilliant London-based detective, Holmes is famous for his prowess at using logic and astute observation to solve cases. He is perhaps the most famous fictional detective, and indeed one of the best known and most universally recognizable literary characters.

## **G. K. Chesterton** (1874-1936)

English theologian who wrote 51 short stories featuring amateur sleuth Father Brown, a London parish priest with remarkable powers of deduction.

## **Dorothy L. Sayers** (1893-1957)

English writer best known for her novels and short stories set between WWI and WWII that feature amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey, who solved crimes with wit and style.



## **Dashiell Hammett** (1894-1961)

American author of hard-boiled detective novels and short stories. Among the enduring characters he created are Sam Spade (*The Maltese Falcon*, 1930) and Nick and Nora Charles (*The Thin Man*, 1934). A number of his books were the basis for great films.

*Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade in the 1941 film of Dashiell Hammett's novel The Maltese Falcon.*

**Raymond Chandler (1888-1959)**

His influence on modern crime fiction has been immense, particularly in the writing style and attitudes that much of the field has adopted over the last 60 years. Along with Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, Chandler's Philip Marlowe has become synonymous with the tradition of the hard-boiled private detective in such novels as *The Big Sleep* (1939), *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), and *The Long Goodbye* (1953). Several of his books became classics of film noir.

**Rex Stout (1886-1975)**

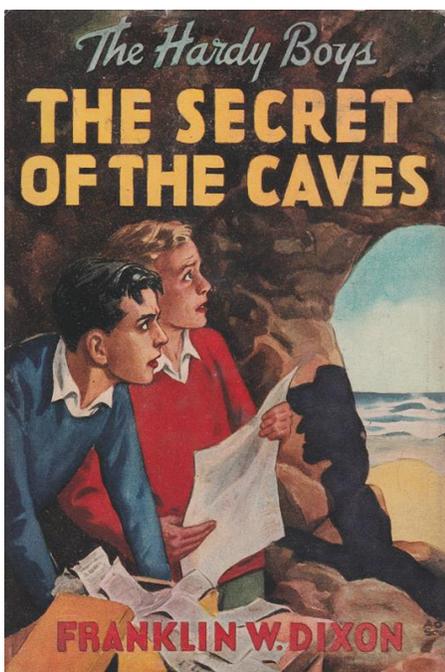
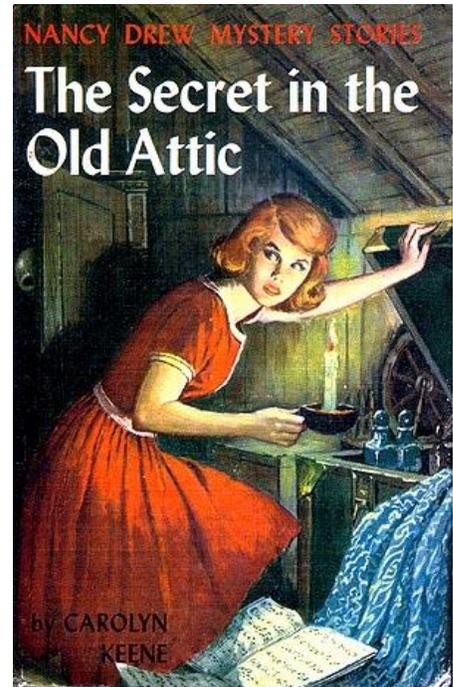
American writer best known as the creator of the larger-than-life fictional detective Nero Wolfe. An eccentric man with gourmet tastes, Wolfe solves crimes without ever leaving his luxury New York townhouse.

**Ellery Queen**

Ellery Queen is both a fictional character and a pseudonym used by two cousins from Brooklyn, New York. In a successful series of novels that covered forty-two years (1929-1971), Ellery Queen was not only the name of the author, but also that of the detective-hero of the stories. Movies, radio shows, and television shows have been based on these works.

**Sue Grafton (born 1940)**

American author of detective novels written from the perspective of a female private investigator named Kinsey Millhone. Grafton's first book of this series is *"A" is for Alibi*, written in 1982. The series continues with *"B" is for Burglar*, *"C" is for Corpse*, and so on through the alphabet.

**ALSO CHECK OUT:**

*The Hardy Boys* is a popular series of more than 300 detective-adventure books for boys chronicling the fictional adventures of teenage brothers Frank and Joe Hardy, age 17 and 18. The first *Hardy Boys* book was published in 1927, and the series continues today.

Nancy Drew is the heroine of more than 175 mystery books; the series first appeared in 1930 and is still going strong. Nancy is an independent-minded 18-year-old. Besides participating in athletics and the arts, she maintains an active social, volunteer, and sleuthing schedule.

# Indiana Academic Standards Alignment Guide

## Reading – Literature

- RL.1 – Read and comprehend a variety of literature independently and proficiently
- RL.2 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by analyzing, inferring, and drawing conclusions about literary elements, themes, and central ideas
- RL.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view
  - Sample: 11-12.RL.3.1: *Analyze and evaluate how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a work of literature (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.*
    - Many of Agatha Christie's works feature urban characters in a rural setting. How does this displacement add tension to the plot? Where in the world today would make a good location for a murder mystery, and why? How could you use the unique qualities of this location to make your story more interesting?
- RL.4 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

## Reading – Nonfiction

- RN.2 – Extract and construct meaning from nonfiction texts using a range of comprehension skills
  - Sample: 11-12.RN.4.2: *Synthesize and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.*
    - Although murder is a horrifying crime in reality, it makes for very popular entertainment in fiction and drama. Why do you suppose we are fascinated by detective mysteries in all formats? Is it our desire to have a hero? Do we need the cause revealed so we can come to an understanding of the actions and thereby have peace of mind? What do you think?

## Reading – Vocabulary

- RV.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying figurative, connotative, and technical meanings
  - Sample: 9-10.RV.3.1: *Analyze the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in works of literature, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings.*
    - We learn about characters from what they say, what they do, and from what other characters say about them. Choose one of the characters from *The Mousetrap* and do a character analysis beginning with those three points. Then extrapolate more biographical information about your chosen character, such as age, gender, education, passions, aspirations, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams, work life, relationships, socioeconomic position, etc. Write a poem or story from your chosen character's point of view, imagining a different aspect of his or her life from that in the play.

# Pre-Show Activities

## Discussion:

What other mystery plays or movies have you seen? What elements of the mystery genre establish mood, tone, and atmosphere? What do you believe are the key ingredients of an engaging detective mystery?

## Activities:

Compare and contrast several fictional detectives various authors have created. What are their differences and similarities? What if any are their idiosyncrasies? What makes them engaging to readers that authors are able to write series? What are the interesting sidekicks these detectives have? Here are a few to get the discussion started and to spark further reading in this genre:

*Dog on It* (The Chet and Bernie Mystery Series) by Spencer Quinn

*Ghost Hero* (Bill Smith/Lydia Chin Novels) by S. J. Rozan

*Devil in a Blue Dress* (Easy Rawlins Mysteries) by Walter Mosley

*An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (Cordelia Gray Mysteries, No. 1) by P.D. James

*A Is for Alibi* (Kinsey Millhone Alphabet Mysteries, No. 1) by Sue Grafton

*A Share in Death* (Duncan Kincaid/Gemma James Novels) by Deborah Crombie

*If Walls Could Talk* (Haunted Home Repair Mystery) by Juliet Blackwell

Agatha Christie's detectives Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot



## Discussion Questions

Compare Agatha Christie's detective fiction with today's popular detective television series such as "Law & Order" or "C.S.I." How have changes in technology affected this kind of detective work? How is storytelling different in television from novels, short stories, and/or theatre?

Agatha Christie is perhaps best known for her characters Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. *The Mousetrap* features neither of these characters. How do any of the characters in Christie's play fulfill the same functions as Poirot or Miss Marple might? How might the play be different if it included one of Christie's famous sleuths?

Agatha Christie wrote about a very specific time and place, yet her books are popular all over the world and are still read some 85 years after she began publishing. Why do you suppose her work is able to appeal across all cultural and geographical boundaries? What makes an author's work timeless?

Many of Agatha Christie's works feature urban characters in a rural setting. How does this displacement add tension to the plot? Where in the world today would make a good location for a murder mystery, and why? How could you use the unique qualities of this location to make your story more interesting?

Although murder is a horrifying crime in reality, it makes for very popular entertainment in fiction and drama. Why do you suppose we are fascinated by detective mysteries in all formats? Is it our desire to have a hero? Do we need the cause revealed so we can come to an understanding of the actions and thereby have peace of mind? What do you think?

How do issues of class become expressed in *The Mousetrap*? Which characters are "higher" class and which are "lower"? Why? How does social class affect the characters' interactions? How do the issues of class seen in this play, set in Britain in the 1950s, compare to class issues in America today?

# Activities

Find a murder mystery game kit, or make your own. Create a fictional victim, a murder method, and a series of possible suspects. Secretly choose one student to be the murderer. Plant clues in your classroom, or give each student a different piece of the puzzle. How can you use logic and intuition to discover whodunnit?

In groups, discuss those areas of knowledge each participant feels is his/her area of particular expertise. Once you have this list of your combined knowledge, create a mystery story that makes use of each group member's area of expertise. Each of you might have to do a little additional research to find the necessary tidbit to make your dialogue believable. (Example: If your group has the detective discover a plant on the bottom of the victim's shoe, then the expert on plants needs to research what type of plant you want discovered and why it is that particular plant and share the plant's properties with the readers or listeners.) Your group will have to decide from whose point of view you are telling the story. Also, remember the basic elements of a good story are character, setting, conflict, and resolution. Try improvisation to help move along your dialogue and to maintain or capture your characters' voices. Or your group might make your detective mystery a radio drama. All the above perimeters apply but you have the added element of dramatizing sound and making a recording live or otherwise.

Most people enjoy whodunit and who-are-you guessing games. You can adapt these games to make them relevant to your class work. Create your own detective game for your class.

In playing Celebrity, you can make the name cards relevant to what you are teaching and reading. <http://www.howdoyouplay.net/party-games/how-to-play-the-celebrity-game.html>

You can adapt the setting and characters of a mystery game or Shakespeare game.

[http://www.amazon.com/How-To-Host-Murder-Guilty/dp/1582362297/ref=pd\\_sim\\_t\\_8?ie=UTF8&refRID=1HTHRN94492KCZ144T20](http://www.amazon.com/How-To-Host-Murder-Guilty/dp/1582362297/ref=pd_sim_t_8?ie=UTF8&refRID=1HTHRN94492KCZ144T20)

<http://www.mymysteryparty.com/?gclid=CKPY6cbTycMCFYQ9aQodcLMAgA>

<http://www.amazon.com/Shakespeare-Box-The-Taming-Shrew/dp/0761123814>

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_news/teaching\\_improvisation\\_techniques\\_brings\\_creativity\\_mental\\_flexibility\\_classroom-928959238](http://www.educationworld.com/a_news/teaching_improvisation_techniques_brings_creativity_mental_flexibility_classroom-928959238)

# Writing Prompts

Readers like the detective characters in mysteries such as Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, Nero Wolf, Easy Rawlins, Jim Chee, Jane Tennison, Kinsey Millhone, Jessica Fletcher, Sherlock Holmes, and of course, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Try your hand at creating a contemporary detective of your liking. To develop a full character, ask and answer questions: Where and when does your character live? What are his or her likes and dislikes? How did he/she get into this line of work? What are his or her dreams, nightmares, and aspirations? Family history? Often writers will give their detective character a significant personal obstacle, vice, or quirk: Sherlock Holmes uses drugs, Jane Tennison is an alcoholic, Jim Chee has bad luck in love, and Hercule Poirot has numerous eccentricities. Perhaps your character could have a foible.

After seeing *The Mousetrap*, use the clues in the play to write a different ending in which another suspect ends up being the murderer. Write your new ending as a theatre script or a short story. Write your own minute mysteries. Invent a fictional crime, then craft a series of clues that lead to the culprit. Write your story in a page or less, but leave out the solution. See if your friends can solve the mystery.

Observe a painting from a writer's point of view. Some choices could be Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*, Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, Renoir's *Le Moulin de la Galette*, or George Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. Write a paragraph describing the atmosphere, mood, and setting. Use sensory imagery such as smells and sounds of the location. What emotions are in the air? What might be the time of day? Set the scene for your readers and pull them into your world. Use the painting as a detective uses clues to create a story for what is happening in the painting.

We learn about characters from what they say, what they do, and from what other characters say about them. Choose one of the characters from *The Mousetrap* and do a character analysis beginning with those three points. Then extrapolate more biographical information about your chosen character, such as age, gender, education, passions, aspirations, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams, work life, relationships, socioeconomic position, etc. Write a poem or story from your chosen character's point of view, imagining a different aspect of his or her life from that in the play.

Write a review of the play. What moments made an impression on you? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actor's performance of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? To share your reviews with others, send to: [education.irt@gmail.com](mailto:education.irt@gmail.com)

# Resources

## Books

selected mysteries by Agatha Christie

*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

*Peril at End House*

*Murder on the Orient Express*

*The ABC Murders*

*And Then There Were None*

*Five Little Pigs*

*Crooked House*

*A Murder Is Announced*

*Endless Night*

*Curtains*

*Bedside, Bathtub, & Armchair Guide to Agatha Christie* by Dick Riley & Pam Eds McAllister

*An Autobiography* by Agatha Christie

*Agatha Christie* by Laura Thompson

*The Mousetrap and Other Plays* by Agatha Christie

*A Is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie* by Kathryn Harkup

*Agatha Christie at Home* by Hilary Macaskill & Mathew Prichard

*Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making* by John Curran

*Agatha Christie and the Eleven Missing Days* by Jard Cade

*The Grand Tour: Around the World with the Queen of Mystery* by Agatha Christie

*The Mystery Lovers' Book of Quotations* by Jane Horning

*The Craft of Crime* by John C. Carr

*The Murder Book* by Tage la Cour & Harald Mogensen

*Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection*

## Films

based on works by Agatha Christie:

*Murder on the Orient Express* (1974)

*Witness for the Prosecution* (1957)

*Death on the Nile* (1978)

*Murder at the Gallop* (1963)

*Murder She Said* (1961)

*Murder Most Foul* (1964)

*Poirot* (PBS series, 1990-2013)

*Miss Marple* (PBS series, 1986-1989)

*Agatha* (1974)

*The Mystery of Agatha Christie* with David Suchet (PBS, 2014)

Other detective series and films include:

*Castle* series (2009- )

*The Departed* (2006 – rated R)

*Veronica Mars* series (2004-2007) & film (2014)

*CSI* series franchise (2000- )

*Memento* (2000 – rated R)

*L.A. Confidential* (1997 – rated R)

*Law & Order* series (1990-2010)

*Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988)

*The Rockford Files* series (1974-1980)

*Columbo* series (1971-2003)

*Vertigo* (1958)

*Rear Window* (1954)

*The Third Man* (1949)

*The Big Sleep* (1946)

*Laura* (1944)

*The Maltese Falcon* (1941)

*The Thin Man* film series (1934-1947)

## Websites

[www.agathachristie.com](http://www.agathachristie.com)

[www.mysterynet.com/agatha-christie](http://www.mysterynet.com/agatha-christie)

# Glossary

## **AGA**

The AGA cooker is a heat storage stove and cooker. It works on the principle that a heavy cast iron frame can absorb heat from a relatively low-intensity but continuously burning source, and the accumulated heat can then be used when needed for cooking.

## ***amour***

in this context, a secret or illicit love affair or lover; in French, the word for *love*

## ***Arrivederla***

Italian: until I see you again; the formal version of the more typical “arrivederci.”

## **barmy**

British slang: crazy, foolish, eccentric.

## **Benares brass**

Benares, India, is particularly famous for its Benares Ware: decorative brass ware.

## **Berkshire**

the next county due west of London

## **bilking**

obtaining or withholding money from someone by deceit or without justification

## **birds of Paradise**

a showy perennial plant native to South Africa

## **bona fide**

genuine or real.

## **boorish**

rough, bad-mannered, or coarse

## **Bournemouth**

a popular resort town in Dorset, on the southwest coast of England

## **chicken netting**

the British term for chicken wire

**chilblains**

a painful, itching swelling on the skin, typically on a hand or foot, caused by poor circulation in the skin when exposed to cold

**chintz**

a printed multicolored cotton fabric with a glazed finish, often used for curtains and upholstery

**Christopher Robin**

a character created by A. A. Milne in his Winnie-the-Pooh stories, named after the author's son

**coalscuttle**

a bucket-like container for holding a small supply of coal

**coke**

a solid fuel derived from coal

**daily women**

a domestic worker who commutes daily from her own home and therefore only works certain hours, as opposed to a live-in servant who is always on call

**dogsbody**

a person who is given boring, menial tasks

**dry rot**

wood decay caused by certain species of fungi that digest parts of the wood which give the wood strength and stiffness

***Evening News***

an evening newspaper published in London from 1881 to 1980

***foie gras***

French: (literally) fat liver; a luxury food product made of the liver of a duck or goose that has been specially fattened

**Hampstead**

An area of London with some of the most expensive housing in the London area.

**hooked it**

British slang: gone away, left; similar to the American "beat it"

**Hunt the Thimble**

Hunt the Thimble is a party game in which all but one partygoer leaves the room. The person remaining in the room hides a thimble, or other small object, somewhere in the room. When everyone comes back in, they must locate the hidden object.

**Indian Army**

During the latter part of the British occupation of India (1903 to 1947) there were two types of British soldiers in India. The British Army in India consisted of British Army units posted to India for a tour of duty, which would then be posted to other parts of the Empire or back to the UK. The Indian Army was the force of native Indians recruited locally and permanently based in India, led at first by expatriate British officers and later with some native Indian officers as well.

***jeunesse***

French: youth

**Kensington**

An affluent and densely populated area of London containing the Royal Albert Hall for music and the nearby Royal College of Music, as well as the famous Kensington Gardens.

**Knightsbridge**

Knightsbridge is an exclusive residential and retail district in central London

**Leadenhall Street**

A street in London, long associated with the East India Company, which had its headquarters there. Today it is associated with Lloyd's of London and other insurance firms.

**Leamington**

Royal Leamington Spa in central England, a popular resort town due to its medicinal waters

**magistrate**

a civil officer or judge who administers the law, especially one who conducts a court that deals with minor offenses and holds preliminary hearings for more serious ones

**Majorca**

Majorca is an island located in the Mediterranean Sea off the east coast of Spain. With the advent of mass tourism in the 1950s, it became a very popular tourist destination.

**memsahibish**

A memsahib is a white foreign woman of high social status living in India.

**Ministry**

a government department headed by a minister of state

### **Morgan's Bank**

Junius Morgan, J. P. Morgan's father, began banking in London in 1854.

### **mugs**

British slang for a stupid or gullible person

### **nylons from Gibraltar**

Due to postwar domestic trade restrictions, most nylon stockings produced in Britain had to be exported, creating a high demand in Britain. Because Gibraltar was located near Tangiers, an international free trade zone, it was easy for Gibraltar merchants to acquire such goods. They began to advertise heavily in Britain, offering nylons that could only be purchased in single pairs as "gift" items. In 1950, this dubious export-import runaround was the subject of formal (and somewhat ridiculous) debate in the British Parliament.

### **Paddington**

an area within Westminster, in central London

### **pinch**

British slang for stealing

### **prefab**

Prefabricated homes are manufactured off-site in advance, usually in a factory, in standard sections that can be easily shipped and quickly assembled on site.

### **rasher**

a slice of bacon

### **Red**

A slang term for a communist or socialist; the color red is generally associated with the Communist Party.

### **Ritz Hotel**

The Ritz, London is a hotel located in London, England. A symbol of high society and luxury, the hotel is one of the world's most prestigious and best known hotels.

### **ruddy**

informal British term for bloody, an epithet derived from "by our Lady" and therefore thought to be inappropriate in many social situations.

**schizophrenic**

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder characterized by abnormal social behavior and failure to understand reality. Common symptoms include false beliefs, unclear or confused thinking, hearing voices, reduced social engagement and emotional expression, and a lack of motivation. The term schizophrenia is commonly misunderstood to mean that affected persons have a “split personality.”

**Scotland Yard**

the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police Service in London.

**seven guineas every week**

The guinea was a British coin originally equivalent to the pound, the standard unit of British currency. In 1952, seven guineas was roughly the equivalent of \$30 American, which would be worth about \$400 today.

**Six impossible things before breakfast like the Red Queen**

From Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

Alice laughed: “There’s no use trying,” she said; “one can’t believe impossible things.”  
 “I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

**Socialist**

Socialism is a political and economic theory of social organization that advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.

**souçon**

In English, a very small quantity of something; in French, the word means suspicion

**spiv**

a man, typically characterized by flashy dress, who makes his living by disreputable dealings

**St. Paul’s**

St. Paul’s Cathedral, designed by Sir Christopher Wren and built between 1675 and 1720, is one of the most popular and recognizable sites in London.

**tête-à-tête**

French: head to head; a private conversation between two people

**third degree**

inflicting of pain, physical or mental, to extract confessions or statements

**torch**

the British term for a flashlight

**wax flowers**

artificial flowers

**West two**

W2 is the London postcode (similar to a US zip code) that includes Paddington, Bayswater, Hyde Park, Westbourne Green, and parts of Little Venice and Notting Hill.

**wireless license**

When radio broadcasting began in Great Britain, there were no commercials sold to pay the BBC's expenses; rather, the government introduced a compulsory wireless license. From 1922 to 1971, anyone with a radio was required to purchase an annual wireless license. In 1952, the cost of such a license was one pound, the equivalent of about \$50 today.

**worm in this oak**

Very tiny holes in oak paneling or furniture would be evidence of oakworm damage before the tree was harvested.

**Wren, Christopher**

Sir Christopher Michael Wren (1632-1723) was one of the most highly acclaimed English architects in history. He built 52 churches, including St. Paul's Cathedral.

**yesterday, the fifteenth instant**

in this context, "instant" means the current month

# Going to the Theatre: Audience Role & Responsibility



You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:

Leave mp3 players, cameras, mobile phones, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink must stay in the lobby.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call because this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.