Introduction

The story

Agatha Christie, Woman of Mystery tells the true story of the life of Agatha Christie.

In 1908, at the age of eighteen, Agatha Miller is ill in bed and bored. As Agatha’s elder sister has written a few short stories for magazines, her mother suggests that Agatha try the same thing – but neither her stories nor the novel she writes are published.

In 1911, Agatha visits Cairo with her mother, and meets Reggie Lucy. The couple fall in love, but Reggie has to go to Hong Kong for two years. They agree to marry in two years’ time, when he returns.

But in 1912, Agatha meets Archie Christie. She writes to Reggie to tell him that she is going to marry another man. War breaks out, and Archie, who is in the Royal Flying Corps, wants to get married quickly. They marry on December 24th 1914. During the war, Agatha works in a hospital dispensary, where she learns all about poisons. She writes a book about a poisoning: The Mysterious Affair at Styles, and sends it to several publishers. There is no reply for two years, until 1919, after the end of the war, when The Mysterious Affair at Styles is published. More books follow, and Agatha Christie starts to become a famous and popular writer.

In 1926, Agatha discovers that Archie is seeing another woman. One night, Agatha disappears. Her car is found abandoned. She eventually reappears in a hotel in Harrogate, but nobody has ever found out what happened in the missing days. Eventually, Archie and Agatha divorce.

In 1928, Agatha travels to Baghdad. The train journey becomes the background to many of her novels. Near Baghdad she meets Max Mallowan, an archaeologist. The two marry, and over the next twenty-five years Agatha often travels with him in his work, using the places they visit in her books.

In 1971, Queen Elizabeth makes Agatha Christie a Dame of the British Empire. She dies in 1976 – one of the most famous novelists of all time.

Background to the story

There is always a fascination in detective stories, and Agatha Christie built on the tradition which is probably best shown in Conan Doyle’s stories about Sherlock Holmes. She created two great (and eccentric) detectives. The first, Hercule Poirot, appeared in the first of her published novels, and in many later books. He is a small, rather pompous man, interested in his own appearance (especially his elegant moustache) and rather too proud of his own successes. Miss Marple, on the other hand, is the portrait of a rather typical English lady, living in a pretty English village, and solving crimes through her powers of observation. Both these characters can be seen in the numerous film and television adaptations of Agatha Christie’s novels.

Before reading

Here are some ways to help your students approach the story:
1. Give students the title of the book and show them the picture on the cover. Ask them to try and guess what kind of story it is.
2. Ask the students to read the text on the back cover of the book, and the story introduction on the first page. Then ask them a few questions about the story, or use the Before Reading Activities in the back of each Bookworm.
3. Use the pre-reading activity in this worksheet.
4. If there is a recording of this title, play the first few pages and stop at an interesting point.
Look at these chapter titles from the story. These are all the chapters in the story, but they are not in the right order. Under each title, write a sentence describing what you think could happen in that chapter.

a  A detective story  
One rainy day, Agatha Christie read her first detective story and decided that she wanted to write one, too.

d  A young archaeologist

b  A good detective-story writer

c  A shy young man

e  Agatha disappears

f  Dame Agatha

h  ‘Why don’t you write a story?’

g  Tea at the railway station

To the teacher

Aim: To encourage prediction and thought about the story
Time: 15–20 minutes
Organization: Give a copy of the worksheet to each student, or each group of students. Explain that they are going to read this story and that these are the titles of the chapters, but they are not in the right order. Ask the students to write a sentence under the chapter heading to summarize what they think happens in that chapter. When they have done this they should suggest an order for the chapters. It is not important whether the students actually get the chapter contents correct, or the order correct.
Look at these possibilities for what will happen before the end of the story. Mark the appropriate answer with a tick (√). Then add three more of your own suggestions and mark these as well.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CERTAINLY HAPPEN</th>
<th>PERHAPS HAPPEN</th>
<th>PROBABLY NOT HAPPEN</th>
<th>CERTAINLY NOT HAPPEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agatha writes a successful detective story.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Agatha writes a detective story but nobody wants to publish it.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Agatha has a baby.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Agatha and Archie get divorced.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Archie is killed in the war.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Archie dies shortly after the war ends.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Archie is murdered.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Archie tries to poison Agatha.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Agatha marries Reggie Lucy.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Agatha marries another man.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Agatha dies when she is in her forties.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Agatha dies when she is in her eighties.</td>
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**To the teacher**

**Where:** At the end of Chapter 3

**Aim:** To help students predict using the knowledge of what they have just read

**Time:** 15–20 minutes

**Organization:** Give each student, or group of students, a copy of the worksheet. Ask them to predict whether these things will happen or not.

The students are not expected to predict accurately how the story will develop. Once they have filled in their charts, they should keep them and see how accurately they have predicted as the story develops.
Agatha Christie, Woman of Mystery

After reading activity

Write the dialogue

Read the conversation between Agatha and her mother at the beginning of the story.
Then write your own conversations.

Agatha: I'm bored!
Mother: Well, do something, then. Read a book. Or write a story. Yes, why don’t you write a story?
Agatha: Write a story?
Mother: Yes. Like Madge.
Agatha: I don’t think I can write stories.
Mother: How do you know? You’ve never tried.

Archie Christie and his mother when he tells her he wants to get married.
Archie: Mother, I'm getting married!
Mother: But who to?
Archie: .................................................................

Mother: .................................................................
Archie: .................................................................
Mother: .................................................................

Archie and Agatha when he finds her at the hotel in Harrogate.
Archie: Hello, Agatha.
Agatha: .................................................................
Archie: .................................................................
Agatha: .................................................................

Max and Agatha when they first meet near Baghdad.

Max: .................................................................
Agatha: .................................................................
Max: .................................................................
Agatha: .................................................................
Max: .................................................................
Agatha: .................................................................

To the teacher

Aim: To revise key points of the story and develop writing ability
Time: 30–45 minutes
Organization: Give each student, or group of students, a copy of the worksheet. Ensure that they read and understand the example before writing their own dialogues.