

Mysterious Affair at Styles A (Chs.1-4): Discussion Questions

1. *Characters* Who are the residents of Styles Court? How are they related to each other? What kind of people are they?
2. *Place* Where in general is the story set? What particular settings are described in detail? Why do you think this setting was chosen?
3. *Time* In what period is the story set? At what time of the year? Why do you think this setting was chosen?
4. *Events* Who is murdered? Where, when and how does the murder occur? Who was present in the house when the event occurred or might have committed the crime?
5. *Style/Tone* Who is the narrator of the story? How is he presented? Why? How does he compare to the narrator in other detective stories that you have read?
6. *Context/Theme* Detective stories are generally centered on violence and death, but seldom arouse the emotions of pity and fear. What are the pleasures of reading a detective story?

Mysterious Affair at Styles B (Chs.5-8): Discussion Questions

1. *Characters* Who plays the role of the detective in the story? What kind of detective is he? How does he relate to the narrator and to the official police?
2. *Place* Many classical detective stories have a country house setting. What type of community does the country house usually represent? Is this true of the present story?
3. *Time* How important is the World War I setting to the story itself? How much difference would it make if the story were set before or after the War?
4. *Events* Where, when and how does the detective carry out his investigation? How many different characters does the finger of suspicion point towards during the course of these chapters?
5. *Style/Tone* Detective stories are usually driven by mystery and suspense. How does the author help to create mystery and suspense during the course of these chapters?
6. *Context/Theme* Are classical detective stories always socially conservative? Do they work towards the preservation of the social *status quo*? What about the present story?

Mysterious Affair at Styles C (Chs.8-13): Discussion Questions

1. *Characters* Who is eventually found to responsible for the murder? Agatha Christie's detective stories are often said to be founded on the "least likely person" principle. Is this true here?
2. *Place* How important is it that the story is set in England? How are American and French detective stories generally different from English ones?
3. *Time* The detective story is a modern genre that only emerges around the middle of the nineteenth century. How does it relate to the nature and problems of modernity?
4. *Events* Where, when and how is the solution to the mystery presented? Where you surprised by the outcome? Does the author play fair with the reader?
5. *Style/Tone* How does the story end? What happens to the characters who are proved to be innocent of the murder? What happens to the guilty?
6. *Context/Theme* In his essay "The Guilty Vicarage", the poet W.H. Auden argues that country house detective stories have a religious significance. What do you think he means?