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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



And Then There
Were None

by Agatha Christie

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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And Then There Were None

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. define vocabulary words from the story
2. cite incidents from the story to support the following overall themes:
 - feelings of guilt can disrupt a person's life to the point where death, an end to suffering, is longed for.
 - as people fight for their survival, civilized rules of behavior begin to erode.
 - our system of laws does not always represent justice because some criminals are exempt from prosecution.
3. discuss the extent to which this story meets the following elements present in most mystery stories:
 - the story is like a puzzle with clues so the clever reader can unravel the mystery.
 - a detective investigates the crime and theorizes about possible motives and suspects.
 - the story builds suspense by casting suspicion on various characters and through unexpected twists in the plot.
 - the final solution to the puzzle must be believable and one that is deduced from clues in the story.
4. infer information about characters and events when meaning is not explicitly stated.
5. point out examples of foreshadowing in the story, which help to cast suspicion on the characters and build suspense.
6. discuss the effectiveness of the nursery rhyme, which foretells the murder methods, to add suspense to the story.
7. relate details about the characters in the story, including the following: their occupations, general physical descriptions, and nature of the crime of which they are accused.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Which of the characters in the story do you think feels the most guilt? Explain.
2. Cite two instances from the story where the normally civilized guests behave in an uncivilized way. Why do you think this happens?
3. How does U.N. Owens select his victims?
4. Critics generally believe that a “good” mystery must have clues embedded in the story, a detective who investigates the crime, suspicious characters, a suspenseful plot, and a believable solution. To what extent does this story qualify as a “good” mystery?
5. Which of the stanzas in the nursery rhyme accurately predicts the next murder? Which stanza is the most puzzling?
6. After the first death, what information about themselves do Lombard and Blore keep from the others?
7. Discuss the developing relationship between Lombard and Vera. Why do you think it breaks down in the end?
8. Identify the significance of the following items: the ten china Indian figurines, the seaweed, the gramophone. Discuss how each adds to the suspense of the story.
9. Why do Dr. Armstrong and Wargrave form an alliance?
10. Discuss the final solution to the mystery and its degree of believability.
11. Why do you think the author makes Marston one of the first victims and Vera the last? In what way is Marston’s death ironic?
12. At one point in the story, each of the following characters is suspected by the others of being U.N. Owen: Wargrave, Miss Brent, Mr. Rogers, Dr. Armstrong. Discuss the reasons each is a suspect.
13. Identify the characters who are described as being like a tortoise, a panther, and a bird. What is revealed about the characters by each comparison?
14. Discuss whether or not Wargrave is sane. In your opinion, what responsibility does a citizen who knows a crime has been committed have in making sure a criminal is brought to justice?

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I

VOCABULARY

cleaving – cutting
deportment – the manner of conducting oneself
gramophones – phonographs
recumbent – lying down, resting
sine qua non – an essential condition, qualification

1. Why does Mr. Justice Wargrave believe that “Soldier Island was news!”?

2. What is Mr. Justice Wargrave’s occupation? Why is he traveling to Soldier Island? List two adjectives which might be used to describe his character.

3. What is Vera Claythorne’s occupation? Why is she traveling to Soldier Island?

5. List three adjectives Vera might use to describe Mrs. Rogers. Vera sits by the window of her room and reflects, "Everything—somehow—was a little queer." Other than Mrs. Rogers, what does Vera find "queer"?

6. Briefly describe the mantelpiece in Vera's room. Why do you suppose the entire text of the poem is included in the story?

7. What evidence is there that Vera may feel guilty for Cyril's death?

8. One technique a mystery writer uses to create suspense is by using prophetic statements. These are statements that on the surface seem to be simple observations, but may also be statements foreshadowing events to come in the story. Find an example of one of these statements in the section describing how Dr. Armstrong feels about the island.

9. What is Armstrong's opinion of Wargrave?

10. How does Wargrave feel about Armstrong, Vera, and Mrs. Rogers?

VI

VOCABULARY

balmy – crazy
chastisement – punishment
desultory – disconnected, random
ejaculations – exclamations
obliquely – not straight to the point, evasive
probationer – a person who is in training for a position
solicitude – care or concern

1. Why is Dr. Armstrong a suspect in Mrs. Rogers' death?

2. One of the themes in this story is the power of guilt to disrupt the lives of the guilty. In what way does Dr. Armstrong's guilt haunt his life?

3. Why do you suppose Dr. Armstrong waits until after breakfast to tell the group about Mrs. Rogers' death? What does this action reveal about his character?

4. One of the themes of this story is the idea that as people fight for their own survival, civilized behavior begins to erode. Lombard's decision to let the natives perish to save his own life is an example of this idea. What indications are there in this chapter that the normal social customs are eroding?

5. The search of the island for Mr. Owen is fruitless. What conclusion does Mr. Justice Wargrave make about this failure to locate Mr. Owen?

6. Throughout this novel Christie describes Mr. Justice Wargrave as being tortoiselike. What qualities is she trying to give the judge with this comparison?

7. Mr. Justice Wargrave said, "My point is that there can be no exceptions allowed on the score of *character, position, or probability*. What we must now examine is the possibility of eliminating one or more persons on the *facts*."

Do you agree or disagree with Wargrave's assessment of the situation? State the reason for your decision. Which of the guests are able to be eliminated as suspects by using Wargrave's standards?

8. In what way, using Wargrave's own standards, is he a suspect for MacArthur's murder?

9. What two logical courses of action does Wargrave suggest to the others?
