

Agatha Christie's

MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

By Agatha Christie

Adapted for the stage by Ken Ludwig

Directed by Charles Fee

Contents



- 3 Dear Educator
- 4 A Note to Students: What to Expect at the Theater

SPOTLIGHT

- 5 Who's Who in *Murder on the Orient Express*
- 6 Agatha Christie
- 12 *Murder on the Orient Express* in Multimedia
- 13 From Page to Stage

DESIGN

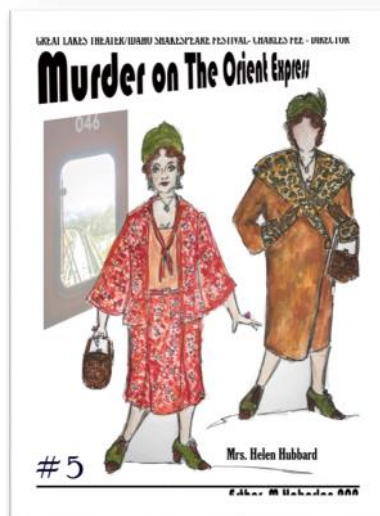
- 15 Costume Design by Esther M. Haberlen
- 18 Scenic Design by Rick Martin

CONNECT

- 19 Discussion Questions Prior to Attending the Performance
- 20 Activities & Writing Prompts
- 21 Discussion Questions After Attending the Performance
- 22 How to Write a Review
- 23 A Sample Review Written by a Student
- 24 A Brief Glossary of Theater Terms
- 26 Learning Standards

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 27 2023-2024 Student Matinee Season
- 28 Residency Program
- 29 Generous Support
- 30 About Great Lakes Theater





Winter 2024

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* by Ken Ludwig. This production will be performed in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from February 9—March 3, 2024.

Detective Hercule Poirot is on the case as passengers riding the opulent Orient Express are stranded on a snowy track with a killer in their midst. Poirot must solve the curious conundrum of who stabbed one American tycoon eight times in his locked compartment before the murderer strikes again! One of Christie's most renowned titles, audiences will love the twists, turns and thrills they encounter as they join Poirot on this mind-bending journey.

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Kelly Schaffer Florian".

Kelly Schaffer Florian
Director of Educational Services
Kflorian@greatlakestheater.org

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "David Hansen".

David Hansen
Education Outreach Associate
dhansen@greatlakestheater.org



A Note to Students: What to Expect at the Theater

You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or video.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that film and television cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc., be completely powered off once you have entered the theatre. Even the glow from a watch or a silent cell phone (used for checking the time, text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as our own camera and editor, choosing our own personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and "tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there may be design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.

Who's Who In

Murder on the Orient Express

Hercule Poirot, a world-famous Belgian detective

Monsieur Bouc, director of the Wagon-Lits train company

Samuel Ratchett, an American businessman

Hector MacQueen, assistant to Samuel Ratchett

Mary Debenham, an English governess

Princess Dragomiroff, a Russian aristocrat now living in France

Countess Andrenyi, a Hungarian doctor

Colonel Arbuthnot, a Scottish military officer

Greta Ohlsson, a Swedish missionary

Helen Hubbard, an American tourist

Michel, conductor of the Orient Express

Head Waiter, of the Tokatlian Hotel



Agatha Christie (1890-1976)



Crine-writer Agatha Christie ca. 1926, a year that would turn her life upside down and lead to a catalyzing trip on the Orient Express to Istanbul and points east.



Agatha Christie's puzzling disappearance for 11 days in December 1926 received daily front-page coverage in the British tabloids.

"You must go to Mosul—Basra you must visit. And you certainly ought to go to Ur." That's the riddle-like travel advice that novelist Agatha Christie received at a dinner party in fall 1928.

Christie took the suggestion to heart. She needed the jolt that travel might provide. Not as a mystery writer. After publishing her first crime novel in 1920—*The Mysterious Affair at Styles*—she had already signed with the William Collins publishing house in 1926. Collins, a rising publisher of detective fiction, published her sixth novel, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* that year. In 1927, she introduced her beloved amateur sleuth, Mrs. Marple, in a series of short stories. In 1928, she brought out *The Mystery of the*

Blue Train featuring her already established Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot.

Christie's personal life had, however, been in disarray for several years. In her autobiography, published a year after her death, the by-then acclaimed "Queen of Crime" skipped over the two-year-span, only commenting, "So, after illness, came sorrow, despair and heartbreak. There is no need to dwell on it."

The "sorrow, despair, and heartbreak" included the death of her mother in 1926 (the two had been inseparable), the deterioration of her marriage (she and Archie Christie, a dashing aviator, had married



During her travels in the Middle East in 1930, the writer met her future husband, archaeologist Max Mallowan. Their marriage steadied her life.

impulsively in 1914), and the author's own mysterious disappearance for eleven days in December 1926. After discovering that her husband was having an affair, she left her eight-year-old daughter Rosalind with a maid at their home west of London and drove off alone into the darkness on December 3. Her car was found abandoned the next day above a quarry the next county over. The car's headlights were still on, and Christie's suitcase was tucked into the back seat.

After an intensive search—covered daily in the newspapers—the writer was located on December 14, at the Old Swan Hotel in Harrogate, in the northern county of Yorkshire. She was sitting in the hotel's dining room, calmly sipping tea and reading a newspaper, when her husband was ushered in to identify her. She purported not to recognize him at first—and never provided a satisfactory account of her absence.

Aware that her writing was going to have to sustain her and her daughter, Agatha Christie pulled herself together to continue publishing. She filed for divorce in April 1928; the divorce was finalized in October.

Travel had always been a go-to source of consolation in her family. Her father Frederick Alvah Miller was a wealthy American socialite who had made a fortune in the US as a mill owner before moving to England. When his investments faltered in 1895, when Agatha was five, the family



Christie settled into a routine of writing and assisting her husband on archaeological digs, where she often photographed artifacts on-site.



An 1880s poster promoting travel on the Orient Express train line appealed to the allure of exotic locations.



Glasswork panels by Art Deco artist René Lalique adorned the train car interiors, contributing to the elegant style of the Orient Express.

rented out their spacious home in Torquay, a seaside town in Devonshire, and spent a year or so hotel-hopping in France. When the family's finances declined further after her father's death in 1901, her mother Clara sent her largely self-taught and home-schooled youngest daughter to a Paris "finishing" school. When Clara Miller fell ill in 1906, mother and daughter wintered in Cairo, Egypt.

These stints awakened Christie's abiding love of travel. After WWI, her husband found employment on a worldwide trade-mission to promote colonial participation in the upcoming British Empire Exhibition.

Leaving their daughter with Agatha's mother, the



A high-end traveler on the Orient Express HAD to have a steamer trunk designed by Louis Vuitton.

couple set off on a ten-month journey in January 1922. Christie later reflected, "Going round the world was one of the most exciting things that ever happened to me. It was so exciting that I could not believe it was true. I kept repeating to myself, "I am going round the world."

It wasn't surprising, then, that the suggestion to visit the ancient Mesopotamian city-state of Ur, in today's southern Iraq, appealed to the soul-weary writer in the fall of 1928. She argued with herself at first, she recalled, "One must do things by oneself sometime, mustn't one?" I never had before - I didn't much want to now - but," she concluded, "I thought: it's now or never. Either I cling to everything that's safe and that I know, or else I develop more initiative, do things on my own. And so it was that five days later I started for Baghdad."

She decided to travel eastward on the famed luxury train, The Orient Express.

Financed in part by King Leopold II of Belgium, a Belgian engineer had launched the "Compagnie Internationale des wagons-lits" in 1876. The new train line initially provided luxury service between Paris and Vienna, with additional lines and destinations added over time. In 1883, the route between Paris and Constantinople (today's Istanbul) took eight days—with an over-water connection across the Black Sea. Connections between London and Paris were soon offered. By 1919, tunnels built along the Simplon Pass between Switzerland and northern Italy cut the

travel time to Istanbul in half.

The Orient Express was the last word in luxury. No expense was spared on such details as caviar, Moët & Chandon champagne, marble-clad bathrooms, and plush bathrobes. During the 1920s, two au courant French artists—designer and furniture maker René Prou and René Lalique, who conjured jewelry, perfume bottles and decorative panels from molten glass—were commissioned to decorate the train car interiors in an Art Deco style.

The luxury train business spawned other deluxe travel endeavors. In Paris, Louis Vuitton launched his fashion empire by crafting designer luggage for high-end travelers. The Tokatlian Hotel catered to the cosmopolitan elite at the end of the Orient Express line in Istanbul. Among the train's clientele were the King of Bulgaria, actresses Marlene Dietrich and Grace Kelly, Lawrence of Arabia, Leo Tolstoy, and the exotic WWI spy, Mata Hari.

The train's carefully curated environment, its intriguing passengers, and the ever-changing landscapes outside its windows—all made a deep impression on the writer, who was always on the alert for new material. In her autobiography, Christie reflected on her love of travel, observing, "You step from one life into another. You are yourself, but a different self. .

. . Your travel life has the essence of a dream. It is something outside the normal, yet you are in it. It is peopled with characters you have never seen before and in all probability will never see again."

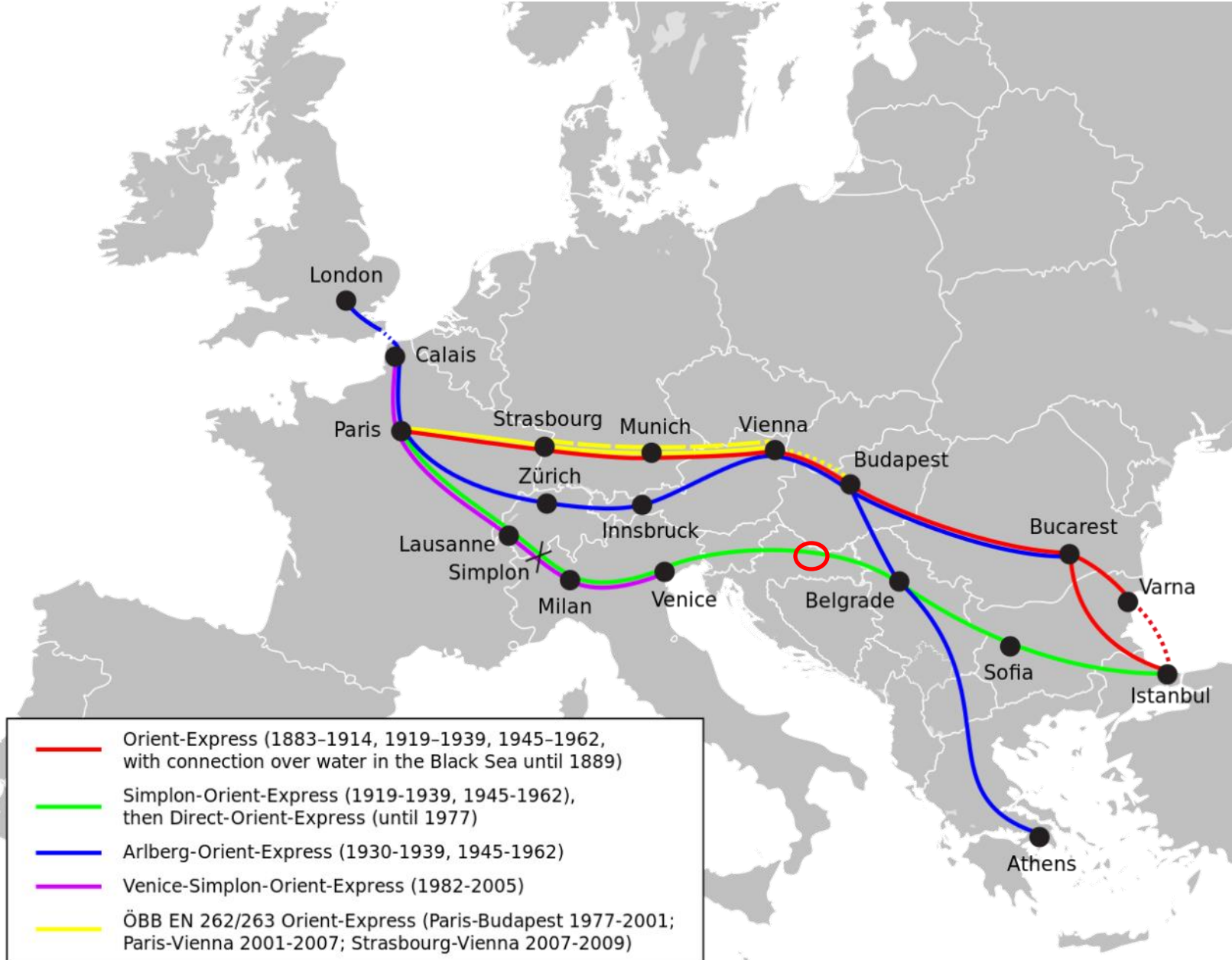
The trip changed the trajectory of Christie's personal life. The writer made her way from Istanbul to Ur, where archaeologists Leonard and Katherine Woolley were excavating the ruins of the ancient city. The Woolleys invited her to return during the 1930 digging season—when the 40-year-old writer met the couple's new assistant, the 25-year-old Max Mallowan. The two adventurers married in September 1930. For the rest of her working life, the intrepid Christie would split her time between writing and assisting Mallowan on his digs, especially at the Assyrian city of Nimrud.

Christie's 1928 trip on the Orient Express also left its mark on her writing life. She would set several mystery novels in the Middle East—such as *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936) and *Death on the Nile* (1937)—but *Murder on the Orient Express* was the first. Serialized in 1933 in the *Saturday Evening Post* (under the title *Murder in the Calais Coach*), the novel appeared in the UK a few months later.

The Orient Express line was run by a Belgian company, and, in detective Hercule Poirot,

The train's route through the Swiss Alps heightened its mystique of romance and adventure.





The above map shows historic routes of the *Orient Express*. The opening of the play takes place primarily in Istanbul. The rest of the play takes place on the train which departs from Istanbul and travels via Belgrade and Venice to Paris, Calais and London via the Simplon tunnel. Of course, it does not complete that journey before the murder takes place while the train is forced to a standstill by snowdrifts across the line in what is now Croatia between Vinkovci and Brod (red circle).

Christie already had a Belgian character who could plausibly know the company's manager in Istanbul—a plot point she envisaged. The fabled train offered the potential for glamorous, well-heeled, international suspects. And yet the train car interiors could create a menacing sense of claustrophobia, which the writer heightened by adding a blizzard outside. A snowstorm stranded the Orient Express in Turkey for six days in 1929, and the writer's own travel on the line was delayed in 1931 when heavy rainfall washed out the tracks as she traveled to meet her husband in Ninevah.

Christie also saw a place in this setting for another story idea that presented itself a year later. As she recounted in her autobiography, "I usually have about half a dozen (notebooks) on hand and I used to make notes in them of ideas that struck me." In 1932, the novelist would have followed the shocking news of the kidnapping of the son of aviator Charles Lindbergh—which was quickly labeled "the crime of the century." Christie began writing *Murder on the Orient Express* as the Lindbergh events were still unfolding. Although the baby was confirmed dead a few months after the kidnapping in March, newspapers avidly followed the



Orient Express cars, 1930

investigation, and its various suspects, over a 30-month period. Christie's imagined resolution appeared in print the same month, September 1934, that carpenter Richard Hauptman was arrested. Hauptmann was convicted in 1935 and executed in 1936.

How Agatha Christie grafted the most infamous case of the day onto the Orient Express setting is best left to her own telling. But detective Hercule Poirot is at the center. The fastidiously groomed Poirot, with what Christie called, "the most magnificent moustaches in all England," relied on his impressive "grey cells" as well as his canny intuition. Poirot would put on a show when he gathered the suspects for a final dissection of the crime. Michael Green, who wrote the screenplay for the 2017 film version of the *Murder on the Orient Express*, called Poirot "a world class invention."

Christie was not entirely enamored of her own invention. By 1930, she already found him "insufferable," she later confessed. But she refused to let her public down, penning 33 Poirot novels, two plays, and 51 short stories altogether. The detective finally met his demise in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, which was published in 1975, a year before Christie's death—even though she had locked the finished manuscript in a bank vault thirty years earlier. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, the master crime writer placed her masterful creation in an excruciating bind by challenging his strict sense of right and wrong. Of such palpable tension was born one of Agatha Christie's greatest works.

Murder on the Orient Express centers on Christie's Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot — pictured here in an illustration devised for another 1933 release, serialized in the US under the name "13 For Dinner."

The shocking news of the "Lindbergh kidnapping" in 1932 gave Christie an idea for raising the stakes in the novel that became *Murder on the Orient Express* (1933).

WANTED

INFORMATION AS TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF

CHAS. A. LINDBERGH, JR.

OF HOPEWELL, N. J.
SON OF COL. CHAS. A. LINDBERGH
World-Famous Aviator

This child was kidnaped from his home in Hopewell, N. J., between 8 and 10 p. m. on Tuesday, March 1, 1932.

DESCRIPTION:

Age, 20 months	Hair, blond, curly
Weight, 27 to 30 lbs.	Eyes, dark blue
Height, 29 inches	Complexion, light
Deep dimple in center of chin	
Dressed in one-piece coverall night suit	

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO
COL. H. N. SCHWARZKOPF, TRENTON, N. J., or
COL. CHAS. A. LINDBERGH, HOPEWELL, N. J.

ALL COMMUNICATIONS WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE

COL. H. NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF
Supt. New Jersey State Police, Trenton, N. J.

March 11, 1932

Vol. cxx, No. 1
The American Magazine
March 1933

A baffling, thrill-packed mystery
By **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

There were
Love...
Greed...
Hate... the
Will to Kill
and...

13

For Dinner

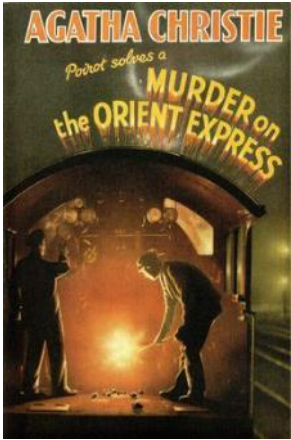
THE mystery of the public is short. Already the interest in the case has faded. He did not choose to appear in it. The crowd went elsewhere — and that is how he wished it to be. Moreover, from Poirot's own private point of view, the case was one of his failures. He always swore that it was the chance remark of a stranger in the street which put him on the right track.

However that may be, it was his genius that discovered the truth of the affair. But for Hercule Poirot I doubt if the crime would have been brought to the attention.

I feel, therefore, that the case has come for me to set down in

Illustration by W.T.

Murder on the Orient Express In Multimedia



The cover for the novel's first release in the UK in 1934 hyped dark deeds over glamour.

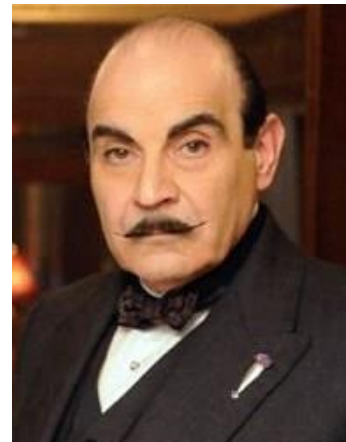
Murder on the Orient Express stands out in a standout career. When the novel debuted in 1934, the Times Literary Supplement applauded Agatha Christie for her ability to “solve once more the seemingly insoluble.” The crime maestro placed it on her own “Top Ten” list in 1972. It came in second to *And Then There Were None* in a “World’s Favourite Christie” poll in 2015.

The book’s first film adaptation, directed by Sidney Lumet in 1974, was also lauded. Although Lumet was best known as a gritty realist and champion of social justice—in such films as *12 Angry Men* (1957), *A View from the Bridge* (1962), and *The Pawnbroker* (1964)—he recognized the questions about guilt and justice that lurked beneath the novel’s surface. While directing and starring in a 2017 film adaptation, Kenneth Branagh similarly noted the novel’s thematic kinship with *Hamlet* and Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. “The desire for accountability for those who have suffered silently screams loudly” in all three works, Branagh told an NPR interviewer, despite their vast differences. Both films recruited “who’s who” casts to capture Christie’s incisive characterizations.

Honoring the writer’s fierce protection of her own work, the Agatha Christie Estate did not permit a stage adaptation until finally tapping Ken Ludwig a few years ago. Ludwig had already penned the Sherlock Holmes-themed *The Game’s Afoot* (2011) and *Baskerville* (2015). His Christie adaptation premiered at the McCarter Theatre Center in 2017.



Albert Finney received an Academy Award nomination for his performance as Poirot in the 1974 film helmed by Sidney Lumet.



David Suchet played Poirot from 1989-2013 in the long running ITV series Agatha Christie’s Poirot.



Kenneth Branagh directed and starred in a 2017 film adaptation.

Ludwig credits encounters in London with Christie’s *The Mousetrap* and the “rollicking” adaptation of *The 39 Steps* for crystallizing his affinity for comedy-mysteries. He began studying the “rules” of both genres. “I think the genres of comedy and mystery have a lot in common,” Ludwig told a New York Times interviewer. “Both start with the puzzle assembled, and suddenly the pieces are taken apart and thrown into the air. And then they finally come down, and all is well.” He also noted that both genres work best at a fast clip. He streamlined Christie’s cast of suspects. Shakespeare’s example of starting his plays in the midst of intense action—a shipwreck in *Twelfth Night*, a street fight in *Romeo and Juliet*—prompted him to begin his adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express* in a gripping and high-stakes way.



A “show curtain” masks the set as the audience arrives in the theater. Designer Rick Martin composed the curtain’s imagery using 3-D digital models of vintage trunks and trains from an online “library” called Sketchfab. The movable curtain has its own part to play in the unfolding mystery.

From Page to Stage

Before diving into rehearsals for *Murder on the Orient Express*, producing artistic director Charlie Fee reflected on why Agatha Christie’s work is so “deeply engaging.” In a quick tour of the murder mystery genre, Fee called out *Oedipus Rex* (“the first murder mystery”), *Hamlet* (“the first real detective—he has to solve a murder mystery”), Edgar Allan Poe (“the first literary detective writer”), and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (“the completely iconic Sherlock Holmes”).

Agatha Christie was steeped in such history. She named her play, *The Mousetrap*, after Hamlet’s play-within-a-play. Poe’s French detective C. Auguste Dupin and Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes were both brilliant, eccentric devotees of “ratiocination,” the art of reasoning. Christie cast her first literary detective, Hercule Poirot, in the same mold—though he was Belgian, not French. Also, as Fee pointed out, “Poirot is a policeman. His *raison d’être* is the search for justice.”

“The key is having that character who fascinates us,” added Fee. “Poirot is a puzzle master. And

we love puzzles. Whether it’s Wordle or the NY Times crossroad puzzle, there is a solution. We’re in it with Poirot. We’re following every piece of the investigation. As he sits with the evidence, we’re trying to get to it before he does. At the end, we realize that there is a logical, rational explanation for what happened. And that is deeply satisfying.”

But *Murder on the Orient Express* adds a twist, ending in what Fee called “unusual territory.” Ludwig’s adaptation trimmed the number of suspects from 12 to 8—a practical and appreciated staging decision. But, advised Fee, “12 is the number of people in a jury, not one lone wolf out for revenge. Murder mysteries typically find the truth. Christie offers options. That’s an intriguing turn of events.”

Equally intriguing is the mystery’s setting on a snowbound train. “The train,” admitted Fee, “is the show’s central design problem.” Scenic designer Rick Martin had to accommodate 16 scene changes and

convey both the train's motion and the fall of snow outside. Without giving his solutions entirely away—a turntable, a moveable show curtain, and a skeletal version of a train are involved—Martin called the set “a question of geometry,” confessing, “It’s a puzzle.”

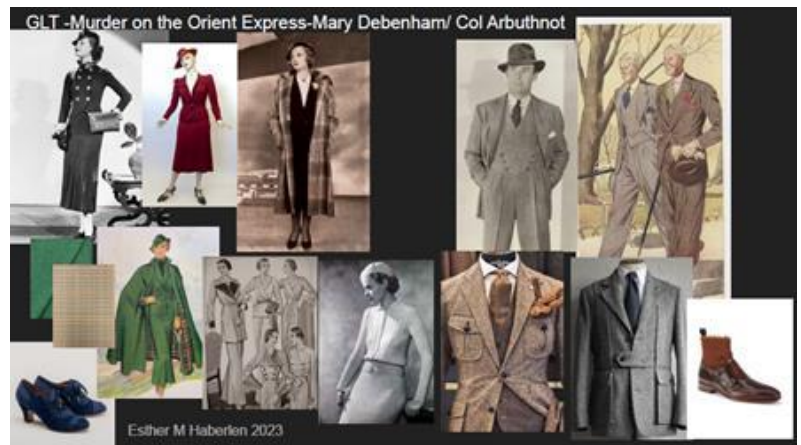
In addition to intrigue, said Fee, “We also wanted style.” As costume designer Esther Haberlen observed, “In the 1930s, the tailoring is impeccable for people who have money. Everybody always looks super put together.” Haberlen scoured fashion imagery to find the most character-appropriate travel suits, travel accessories (including coats, hats, gloves, and luggage), sleepwear for the cabins, and jewelry, gowns, and dinner jackets for the dining car.

Both designers were asked, reported Rick Martin, “to provide more to see, more to think about for audience members trying to solve the mystery.” The set’s open plan allows the audience to notice encounters in the passage and the personal items pulled from suitcases. Designers and crew responsible for the set, furniture, props, costumes, wigs, sound, lighting, and electrical wiring have all worked closely with director Charlie Fee to create the choreography of clues about to unfold.



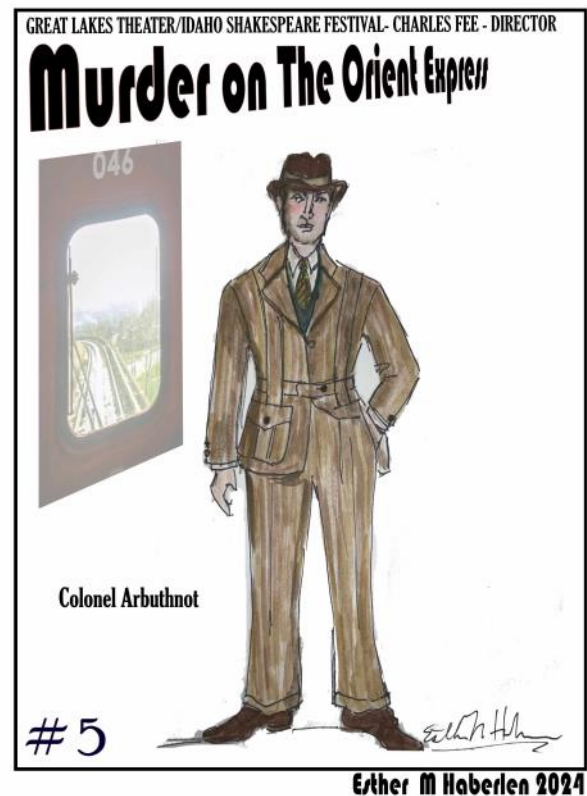
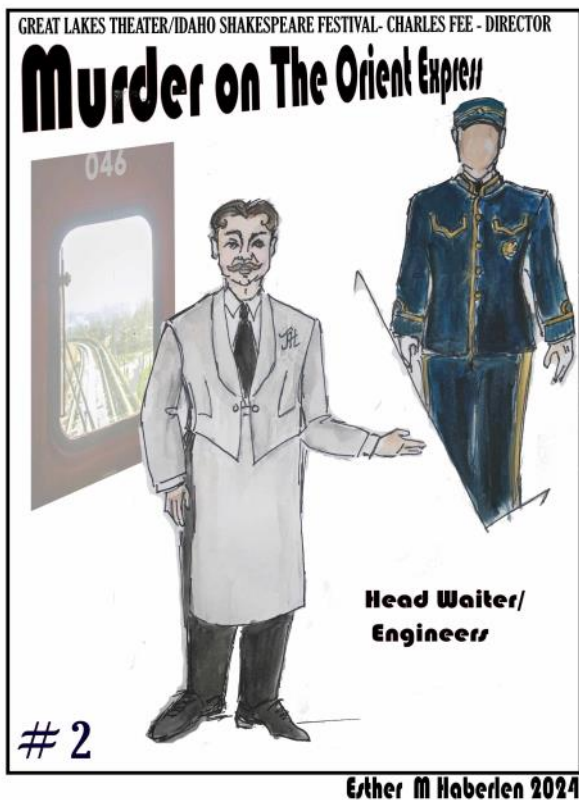
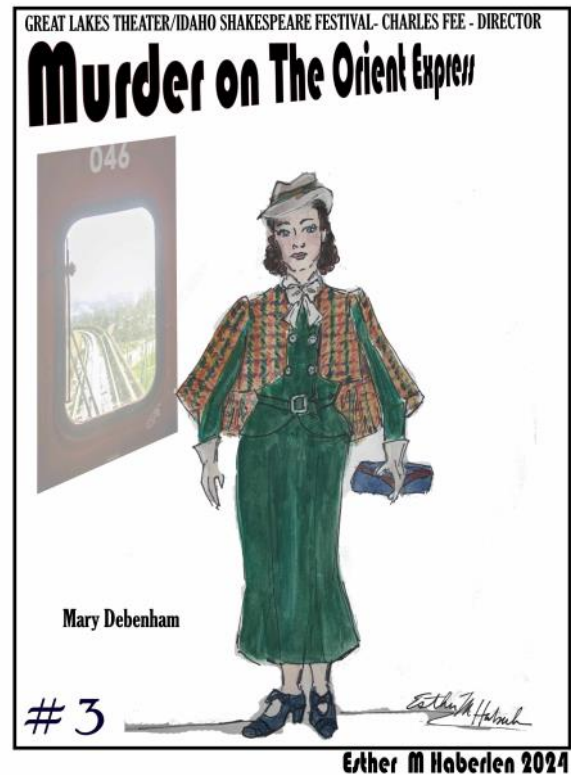
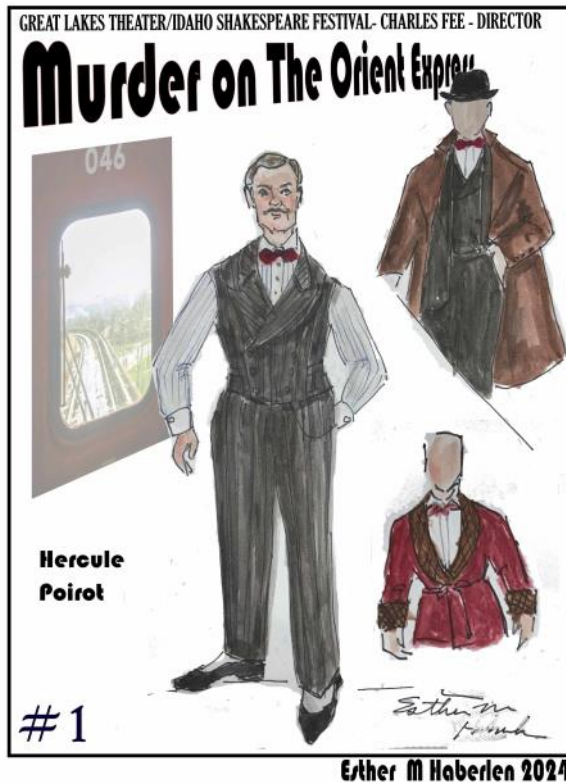
A skeletal version of a train interior, mounted on a turntable, provides the possibility for motion, a variety of playing spaces, vistas outside the train, and more visual clues.

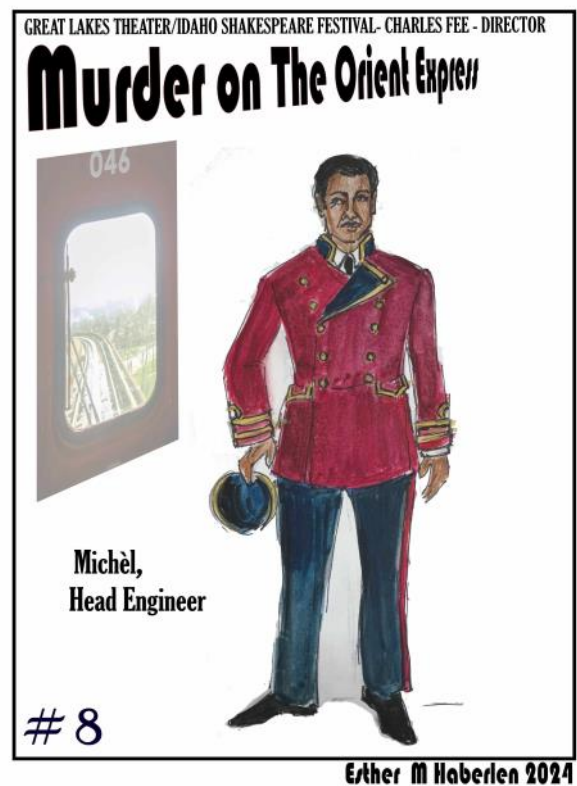
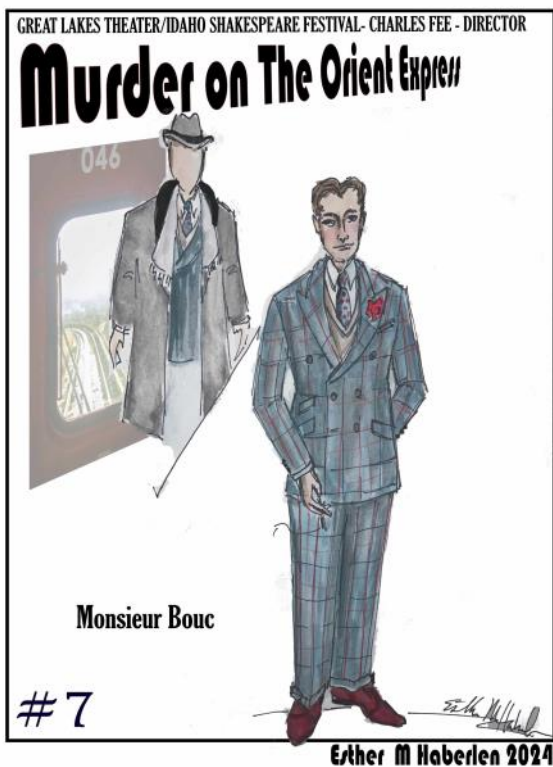
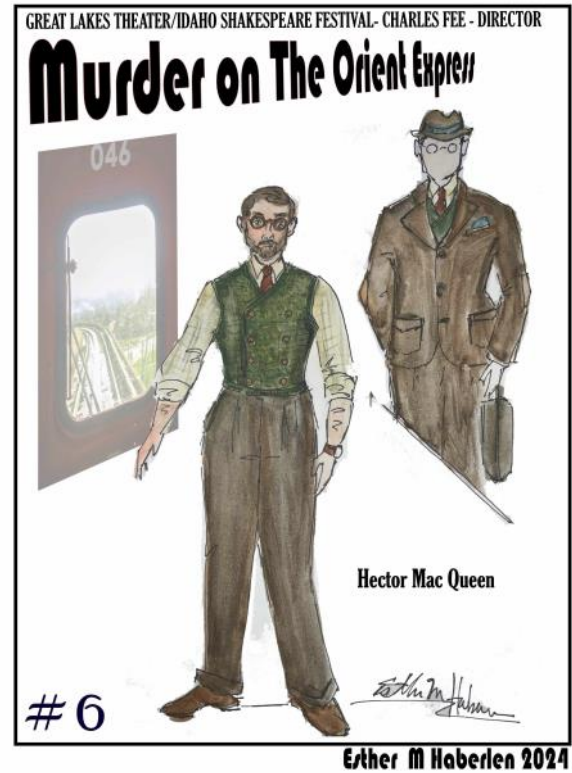
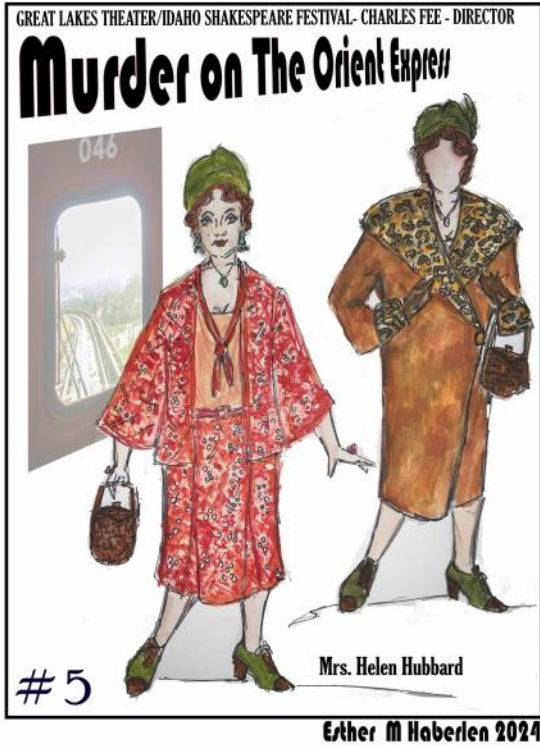
Images of fashionable celebrities of the 1930s—such as Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and Joan Crawford—inspired specific costume choices.

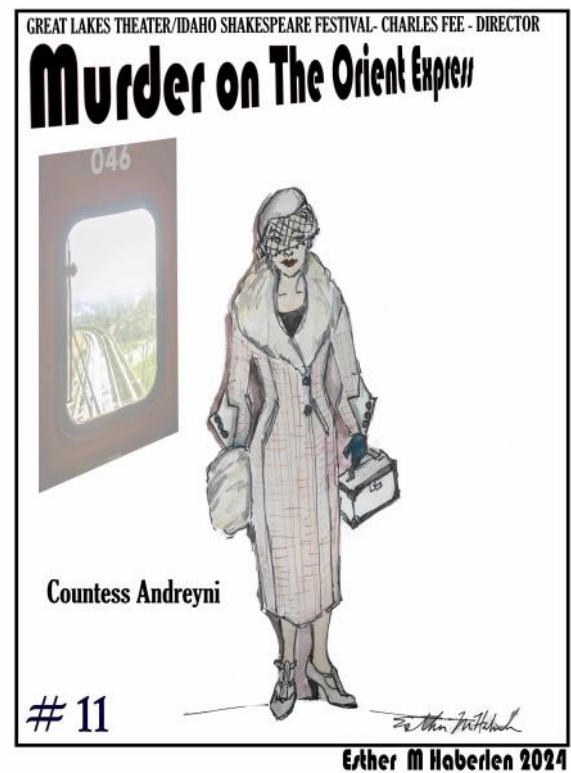
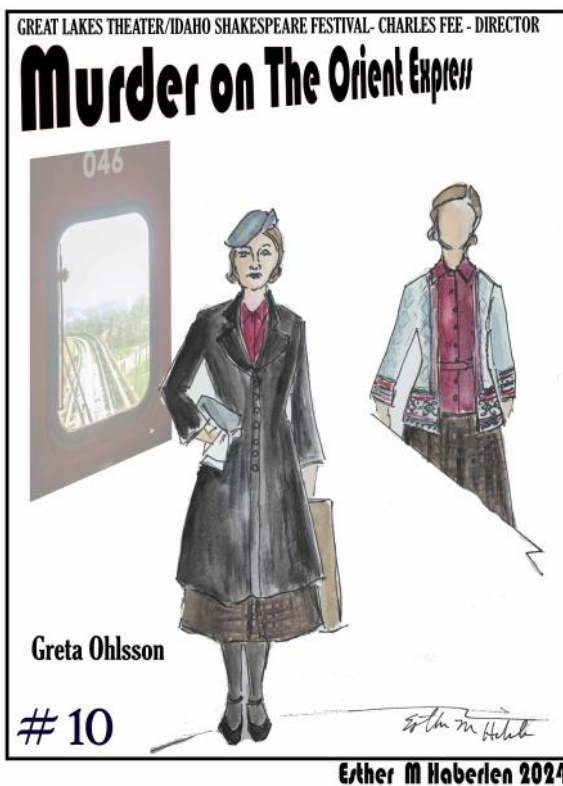
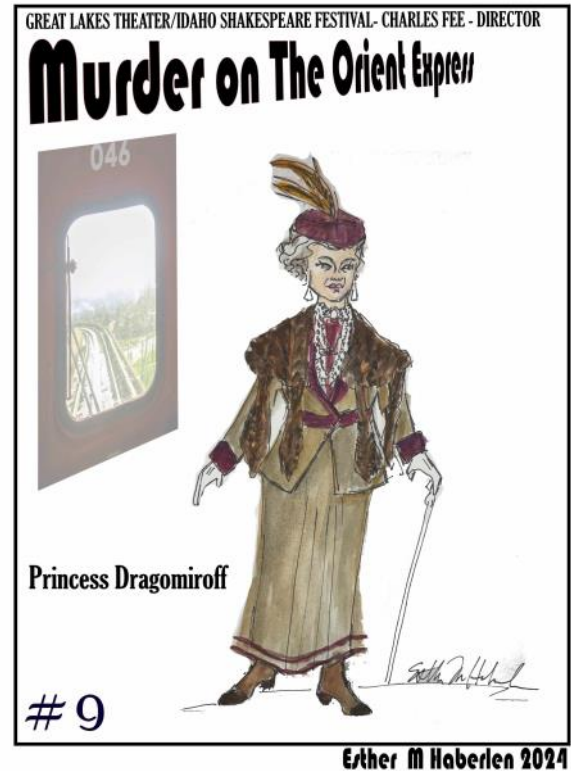
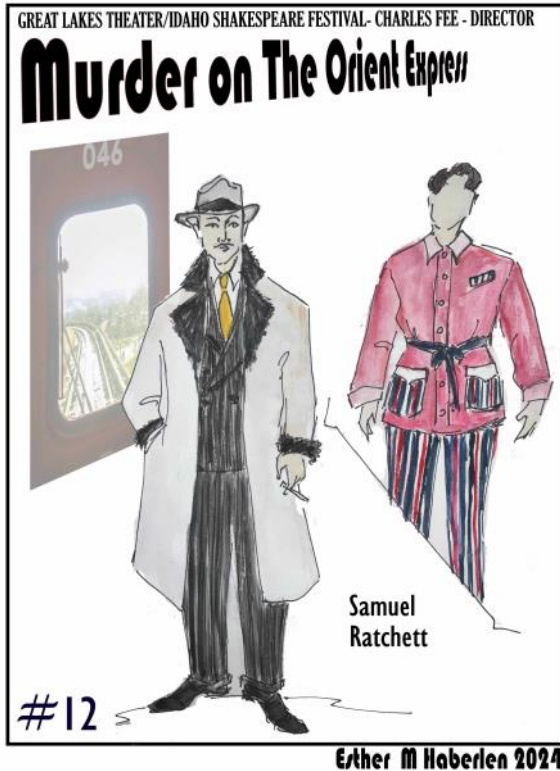


Opposite page: *Murder on the Orient Express* show curtain by Rick Martin, with adapted Sketchfab assets licensed under CC Attribution: “Old travel case” by b_nealie, “Wooden Chest 3D Scan Artec Eva” by CIMtech Inc., “Vintage Steamer Trunk” by SneakyMrRed, “Old Suitcase” by Amarveer, “HD cssuitcase” by Zeneric, “Old briefcase with number lock (Reupload)” by janexx, “Bag v2 Wolf Low Poly Game Ready Unity Unreal” by KJ, “Worn Black Trunk” by tommccall41, “Travel chest” by HistoPad, “Bag asset” by 3D Guimaraes, “Vintage Suitcase [derivative]” by romullus and “loco” by Willy Decarpentrie.

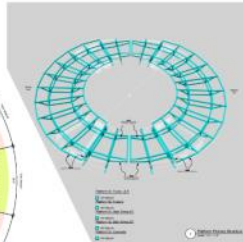
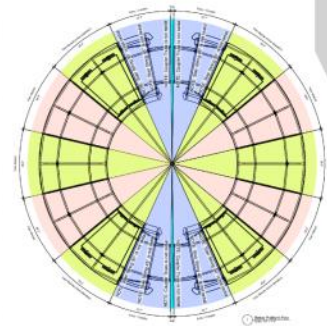
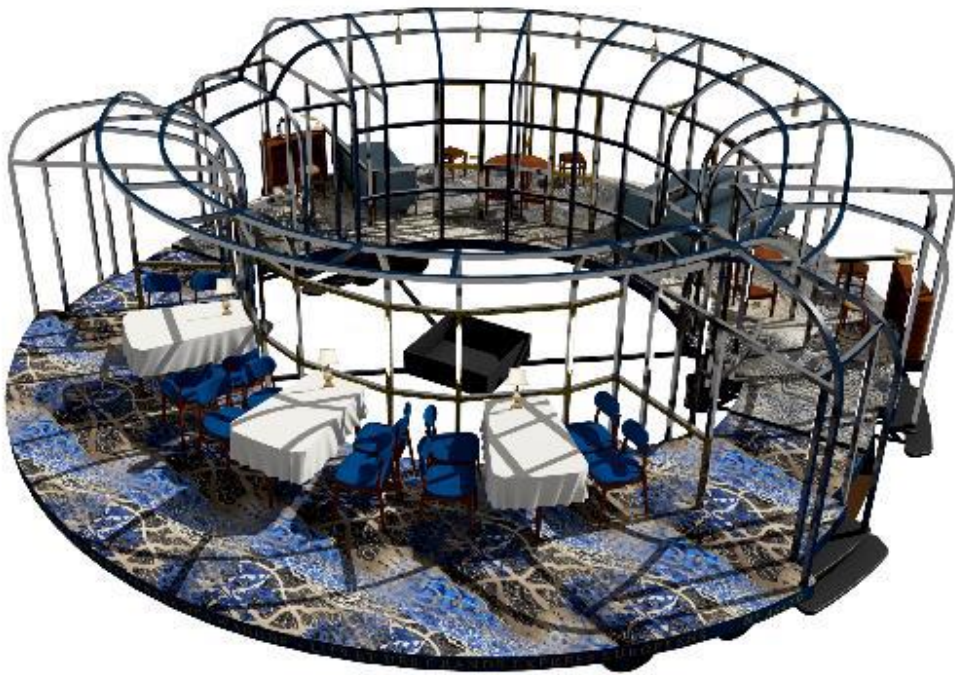
Collages of images of period clothing and accessories, as well as fabric swatches, provide inspiration for costume designer Esther Haberlen as she developed costume renderings for each character, in this case, for passengers Mary Debenham and Colonel Arbuthnot. In the 1930s suits for both men and women were often double breasted and belted.





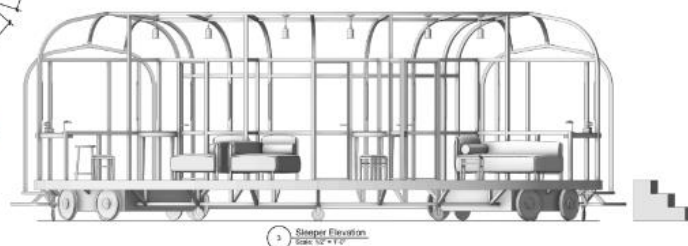
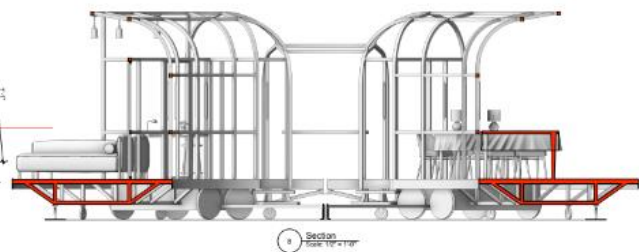
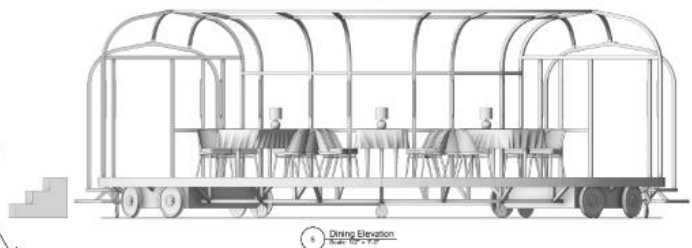
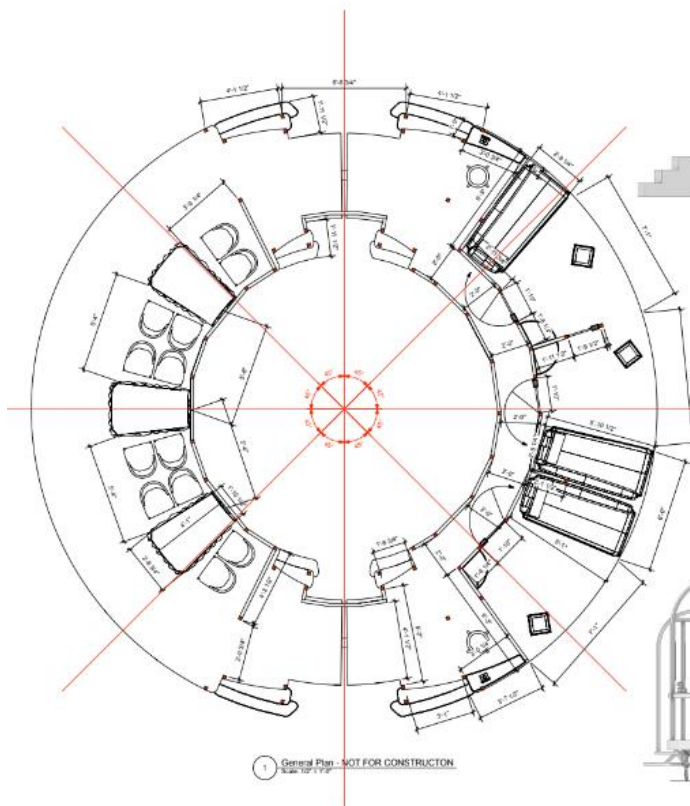


3-D rendering of the set for
Murder on the Orient Express



Arial view of the undercarriage
mechanism that creates the merry-
go-round rotation of the set

General ground plan (left) with
front elevations in sections (right)



Discussion Questions

Prior to attending the performance

1. The setting of this story — a train journey — is a crucial aspect of the narrative. Why do you think an enclosed space like a train might be an effective setting for a mystery or a thriller? How does the setting of the Orient Express contribute to the overall atmosphere of the story?
2. With the exception of William Shakespeare, Agatha Christie is the most successful writer of all time. Based on this fact, what are your expectations for a murder mystery based on an Agatha Christie novel? Why do you think her mysteries continue to captivate audiences?
3. Adaptations can often differ significantly from their source material. What are some challenges you anticipate in adapting a complex murder mystery novel to a stage play? What elements do you think are crucial to retain, and what changes might be necessary for the stage?
4. The play is set in the time between World Wars One and Two. How does the time period in which the story is set influence the characters' behavior and perspectives? Consider the impact of cultural and societal norms on the characters' actions and decisions in *Murder On the Orient Express*. Discuss the significance of the diverse characters aboard the Orient Express and how their backgrounds might influence the unfolding events.
5. A “red herring” is a piece of information meant to mislead or distract an investigator. Discuss the role of red herrings in mystery storytelling. How do they enhance or challenge the audience's ability to solve the mystery?
6. Explore the theme of justice versus revenge. How might characters' personal motives conflict with the pursuit of justice? Are there situations where murder can be morally justified? Discuss the moral dilemmas presented in the story.
7. Ensemble casts, where many characters have significant roles, are common in mystery narratives. Why do you think having a diverse cast of characters is important in a mystery story?
8. Live performances offer unique ways to engage audiences. What theatrical techniques do you think might be particularly effective in conveying a sense of suspense or danger in a mystery play?

Activities & Writing Prompts

INCLUDES SPOILERS!

1. **Character Dossier Project:** Have students select a character from the novel and create a comprehensive dossier or profile. This should include the character's background, motives, key actions in the story, and a psychological profile. Encourage students to use evidence from the text to support their profiles and to make creative "identity documents" or props that represent their characters.
2. **Mock Trial:** Conduct a mock trial for the murder of Mr. Ratchett. Assign students roles (lawyers, witnesses, accused, judge, jury, etc.) and have them use evidence from the book to argue their cases. This activity will help students explore the themes of justice and morality while practicing argumentative skills and critical thinking.
3. **Creative Writing - Alternate Endings:** Ask students to write a solution to the mystery or conclusion to the novel. This will encourage them to think critically about the original ending and explore different possibilities within the narrative. After writing, students can share their endings and discuss how different resolutions impact the story's themes.
4. **Historical Context Presentation:** In groups, students can research and create presentations on the historical and cultural context of the 1930s, focusing on aspects like travel, societal norms, criminal justice, or international relations. Understanding the context can provide deeper insights into the characters' motivations and the story's setting.
5. **Role-Playing Roundtable Discussion:** Students take on the roles of different characters and participate in a roundtable discussion about the events on the Orient Express. This can help students explore character development, motives, and the different perspectives presented in the book.
6. **Clues and Evidence Board:** As a class, create a visual "evidence board" mapping out the clues, characters, and alibis in the story. This hands-on activity can help students keep track of the complex plot and understand the deductive reasoning process.
7. **Thematic Debate:** Organize debates on the major themes of the book, such as justice vs. revenge, or the moral implications of the passengers' decision. This encourages students to engage critically with the text, articulate their thoughts, and consider opposing viewpoints.
8. **Symbolism and Motif Hunt:** Have students identify symbols and motifs throughout the novel. They can create visual representations or collages that depict these motifs and explain how they contribute to the story's overall meaning and themes.
9. **Film Comparison Essay:** After reading the book, have students watch one of the movie adaptations and write a comparative essay. Encourage them to discuss similarities and differences, and consider how the visual representation affects their understanding of the story.
10. **Cross-Curricular Connection - Geography Journey:** Incorporate a geography lesson by having students map out the route of the Orient Express, researching each country the train passes through. This can expand their understanding of the novel's setting and the various nationalities and cultures of the characters.

Discussion Questions

After Attending the Performance

1. *Murder on the Orient Express* is known for its unexpected resolution. How does Christie build suspense and keep the reader guessing, and what does this say about her understanding of human psychology?
2. Consider the moral ambiguity of the novel's conclusion. Does the resolution challenge conventional views of justice? Discuss how Christie portrays justice and how it aligns or conflicts with legal systems.
3. The story is set on a train, essentially an enclosed space. How does Christie use this setting to heighten tension and develop the narrative? Consider the limitations and possibilities this setting creates.
4. Hercule Poirot, the detective in the novel, solves crimes using 'the little grey cells' of his brain, emphasizing psychology over procedural police work. How does this approach affect the unfolding of the plot and the development of other characters?
5. While the character Hercule Poirot was exceedingly popular with readers, Agatha Christie became less enamored with her creation over the years. How did you feel about the character as you read the novel? Did that change after you watched the Great Lakes Theater production?
6. The novel features a diverse cast of characters from various backgrounds. How does Christie use these characters to explore themes of prejudice, nationality, and cultural identity during the time period the novel was written?
7. The idea of retribution is central to the novel. Discuss how the characters' past actions inform their decisions and the eventual outcome of the story. Does the novel suggest that people are inherently capable of evil?
8. *Murder on the Orient Express* was written between the World Wars, a period of significant societal change. How are the tensions and cultural shifts of this era reflected in the book's characters and themes?
9. Christie's novels are often considered commentaries on human nature. What aspects of human nature does *Murder on the Orient Express* explore, and how do these themes resonate in today's world?
10. Explore the role of deception in the novel. Almost every character presents a facade at the beginning of the story. How does Christie use these deceptions to drive the plot and develop her characters?
11. How does *Murder on the Orient Express* reflect Agatha Christie's views on the complexity of human morality? Did Ratchett deserve to die? Should Ratchett's murderers have been turned in to the police? Discuss how she uses the novel to suggest that morality is not black and white, but rather filled with shades of grey.

How to Write A Review

MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can disapprove of the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sounds you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are in telling the story of the play.

IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

A Sample Review Written by a Student

"Gambit": More Poetry Than History — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

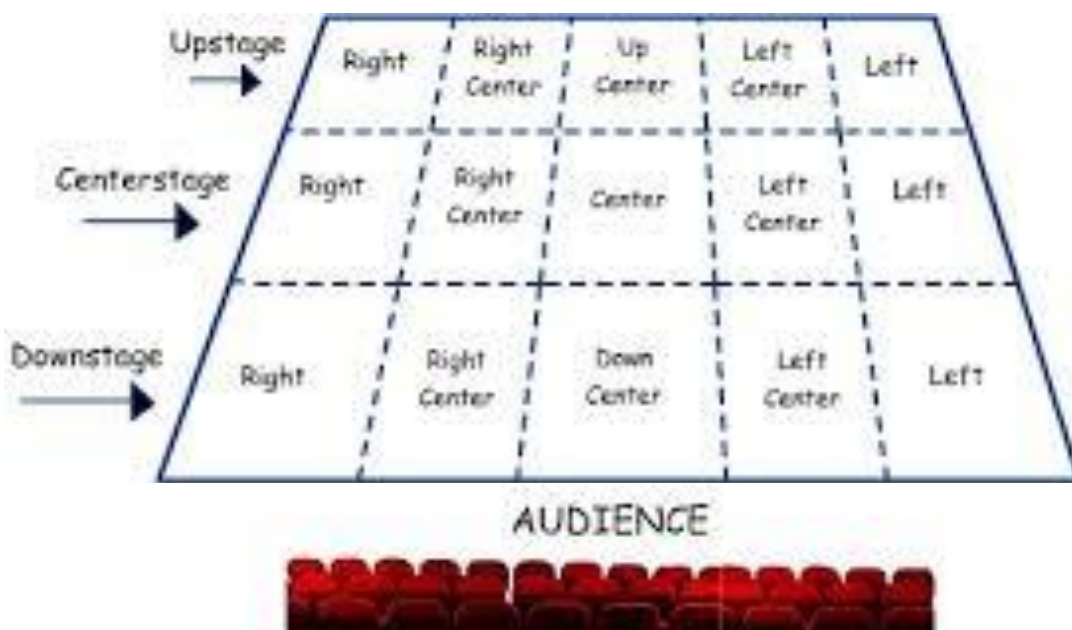
<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>

A Brief Glossary of Theater Terms

Apron	The part of the stage in front of the curtain
Auditorium or House	Where the audience sits
Beam Spread	The area a single light covers
Blackout	Turning off all the lights in the theatre at once
Board	The control center for lights, sound, or both
Book (The)	A copy of the script containing all notes and blocking
Box Office	Where the audience buys tickets
Box Set	A set in a proscenium with three walls
Call	The time certain members of the production need to be at the theatre
Cheat	When an actor takes a realistic action and modifies it for the audience to see
Cloth	Scenery painted on fabric
Cue	A line or action that immediately leads to another action by the actor (for them to speak) designer or stage manager (to change the lights or sound)
Curtain Call	The bows at the end of the show
Dimmer	Equipment that controls the brightness of a light
Director	The creative head of a production. They create a vision for the show and work with actors, designers, and crew to bring that vision to life
Flat	A frame covered with canvas, cardboard, or some other light material which is then painted as part of the set
Floodlight	A light that has a wide unfocused beam covering most of the stage
Fly	A system used to raise set backgrounds, set pieces, or potentially actors
Follow-spot	A spotlight that can follow an actor as they move across around the stage
Footlights	Floodlights on the floor at the front of the stage.
Gel	A piece of plastic placed over the light to change its color
Greenroom	A room where the company can relax, eat, or potentially watch the show if a TV and a camera has been rigged
Notes	The director's notes on the performance or rehearsal
Pit	An area between the stage and the audience where an orchestra can sit (typically below audience level)
Producer	The person responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of a production (as opposed to the creative head, the director).
Properties or Props	Items used by actors in a show (such as swords, plates, watches, etc.)

Proscenium	A type of stage defined by a proscenium arch. Proscenium theatres typically distinctly separate the audience and stage by a window (defined by the proscenium arch). The stage typically will not go far past the proscenium arch (the Ohio Theatre, for example).
Raked Stage	A stage that is angled (upstage is the top of the hill and downstage the bottom) so that the audience can see the action more clearly
Set	The scenery used in a scene or throughout the play
Set Dressing	Parts of the set that don't serve a practical function but make the set look realistic.
Spotlight	A type of light that is focused so that it can light a very specific area
Strike	Taking apart and removing a set from the theatre
Thrust	A stage that goes beyond the proscenium arch so that the audience is sitting on three sides of the set - in front, and on either side (the Hanna Theatre, for example).
Tracks	The rails on which curtains (tabs) run.
Trap	A hole in the stage covered by a door where actors or set pieces can exit or enter
Understudy	An actor who learns all of the lines and blocking of another actor (typically one of the actors in a lead role) who can perform in case the main actor cannot go on
Upstage	The rear of the stage
Wings	The sides of the stage typically blocked off by curtains where actors and crew can stand and wait for their cues

STAGE DIRECTIONS



Learning Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.7

Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.A

Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1.A

Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.A

Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5.B

Analyze nuances in the meaning of words

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.6

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).



**GREAT
LAKES
THEATER**

**Student Matinee Series
2023-2024 Season**

Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812 by Dave Malloy

Dracula: The Bloody Truth by Le Navet Bête & John Nicholson

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

Agatha Christie's **Murder on the Orient Express**, adapted by Ken Ludwig

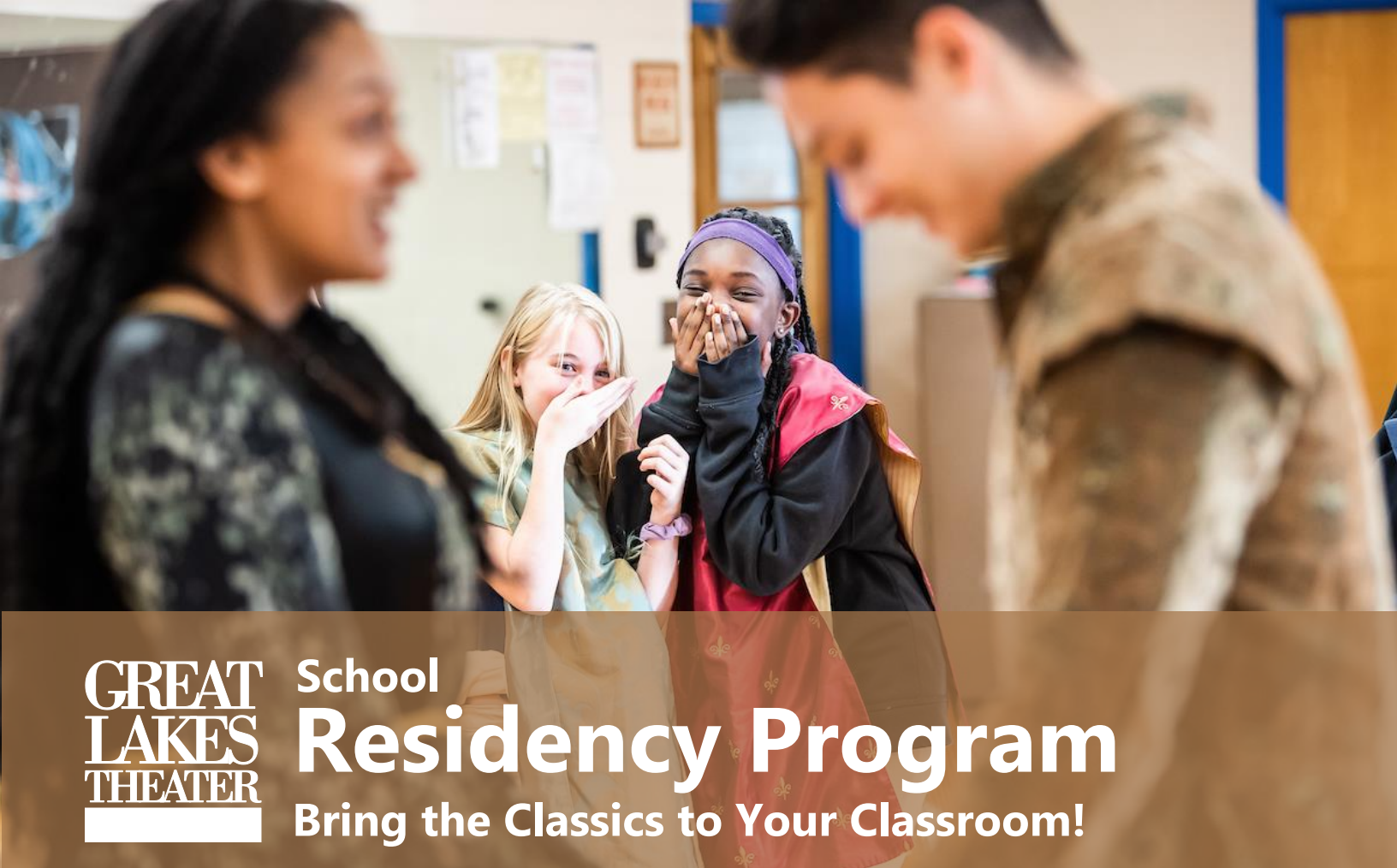
The Merry Wives of Windsor by William Shakespeare

Always...Patsy Cline - by Ted Swindley

Make Classic Theater Come Alive for Your Students!

Since 1962, students have enjoyed the thrill of experiencing classic plays, professionally produced by Great Lakes Theater. Our student audiences experience the same top-quality productions offered in our public performances, but at a fraction of the cost. The state-of-the-art classical thrust stage configuration in the gorgeously renovated Hanna Theater affords students a dynamic audience experience unequaled in our region.

[Greatlakestheater.org/education](https://greatlakestheater.org/education)



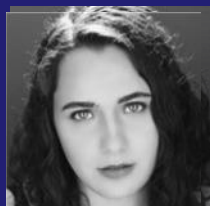
School Residency Program

Bring the Classics to Your Classroom!

Launched in 1981, Great Lakes Theater's in-school residency program is now one of the most successful artist-in-residence programs in the country. Each year over 16,000 students in over 100 schools experience the pleasure, power and relevance of classic literature brought to life in their own classrooms.



From *The Sneetches* to *Romeo and Juliet* (and so many more in between!) each week-long residency uses an



interactive, hands-on approach, and is designed to meet the common core education standards. We visit your school with scripts, props, costumes—and for high schools, swords, daggers and stage blood—to explore classic literature in an unforgettable way!

For more information contact Lisa Ortenzi at 216.453.4446
Greatlakes theater.org/education

Generous Support

Community Foundation of Lorain County
Cuyahoga Arts & Culture
Eaton
Evans Charitable Foundation
Harry K. & Emma R. Fox Charitable Foundation
Giant Eagle Foundation
The George Gund Foundation
Victor C. Laughlin, M.D. Memorial Foundation Trust
The Lubrizol Foundation
The McGrath/Spellman Family Trust
The Nord Family Foundation
Nordson Corporation Foundation
Ohio Arts Council
The Reinberger Foundation
The Shubert Foundation
The Kelvin & Eleanor Smith Foundation

And hundreds of generous
Great Lakes Theater individual donors!





Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, bringing students to the theater for matinee performances and sending specially trained actor-teachers to the schools for weeklong residencies developed to explore classic drama from a theatrical point of view. GLT is equally dedicated to enhancing the theater experience for adult audiences. To this end, GLT regularly serves as the catalyst for community events and programs in the arts and humanities that illuminate the plays on its stage.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. As GLT celebrates over a decade in its permanent home at the Hanna Theatre, the company reaffirms its belief in the power of partnership, its determination to make this community a better place in which to live, and its commitment to ensure the legacy of classic theater in Cleveland.

1501 Euclid Avenue, Suite 300 • Cleveland, Ohio 44115 • Tel. (216) 241-5490

greatlakestheater.org