

The Monogram Murders: A New Hercule Poirot Mystery by Sophie Hannah

Sophie Hannah was an unexpected choice by the Agatha Christie estate to write the new Hercule Poirot mysteries. Her books are contemporary thrillers, relying on action and suspense to drive the narrative. Classic mysteries rely on an exploration of character and setting while offering subtle plot twists the reader tries to solve before the protagonist reveals all.

1. What are the key themes of *The Monogram Murders*?
2. When we meet Poirot, he is carefully arranging cutlery. He speaks several times about the importance of 'order and method'. How does his neatness affect his detective work?
3. Edward Catchpool says that he 'has no hope of ever being' a hero. How heroic is he?
4. Catchpool fears 'the proximity of death to the living.' What does this mean?
5. Discuss this statement: "What is wrong with telling stories, for heaven's sake?" asks Nancy.
6. The murders take place in a luxury hotel. What is the significance of this setting?
7. Is *The Monogram Murders* a psychological crime novel?
8. This novel was written in 2013 but set in 1929. Could it have been written in 1929 or set in 2013?
9. Were you surprised by the ending? Was justice served? If so, at what point?
10. Who is your favorite character? Do you have a favorite passage?
11. Would you recommend this book to someone who has never read books by Christie?

The Mysterious Affair at Styles by Agatha Christie

1. According to Agatha Christie, when she wrote *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* she saw it as “a story with a moral: the hunting down of evil and the triumph of good. At the time of the 1914 war . . . we had not then begun to wallow in psychology.” How is this revealed in the characters? Did you find them realistic or stereotypical? Did you identify with any of them, and if so, who?
2. When Hastings describes his reaction to the bucolic village of Styles St. Mary he observes, “It seemed impossible to believe that, not so very far away, a great war was running its appointed course. I felt I had suddenly strayed into another world.” Were there other references to World War I?
3. How would you describe the Edwardian social hierarchy in the novel? Who is on the top of the ladder and who is on the bottom? Does anyone break the rules of this defined social order?
4. What role do outsiders play? Consider, in particular, the characters of Alfred Inglethorp, Dr. Bauerstein, and Hercule Poirot.
5. According to *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, a red herring is “a hint or statement in the early part of the story to put the reader on the wrong scent” (derived from the practice of dragging a smelly red herring across a path to confuse hunting dogs). How many red herrings can you find in this mystery?
6. Captain Hastings admits to Mary Cavendish that he has always harbored a secret desire to become a detective in the tradition of Sherlock Holmes. Compare Poirot and Hastings to Holmes and Watson. What do these two detective teams have in common? How do they differ?
7. According to the critic Anthony Lejeune, “The real secret of Agatha Christie . . . lies not in the carpentering of her plots, excellent though that is, but in her ability to make each page throw the hook for the next.” How does Christie build suspense? Were you surprised when the true murderer was revealed?
8. Hercule Poirot, the five-foot-four, egg-headed, brilliant Belgian detective is the hero of more than thirty novels and fifty short stories by Agatha Christie. What makes him such an appealing and enduring character?
9. How do Agatha Christie’s novels compare with the works of today’s mystery writers, such as Elizabeth George, Sue Grafton, Sophie Hannah and Anne Perry?