



And Then There Were None

(Originally published under *Ten Little Indians*)

By Agatha Christie

Dictation passages



Week One

In the corner of a first-class smoking carriage, Mr. Justice Wargrave, lately retired from the bench, puffed at a cigar and ran an interested eye through the political news in the Times.

He laid the paper down and glanced out of the window. They were running now through Somerset. He glanced at his watch—another two hours to go.

He went over in his mind all that had appeared in the papers about Indian Island. There had been its original purchase by an American millionaire who was crazy about yachting—an account of the luxurious modern house he had built on this little island off the Devon coast.

(Chapter 1)

Week One

Opening: _____

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(Chapter 1)

Why this passage: _____

It's worth paying attention to the opening paragraphs of a mystery novel and even revisiting them once you've finished reading the book. The third paragraph goes on to describe features of Indian Island beyond what is included here. In this particular novel, the island itself acts as one of the characters in a way. Read details about the island and its ownership attentively.

What to note: _____

The opening of many novels does away with indentation in the first line. Some printers will even make the initial capital of a chapter or book larger than the rest of the type. These are stylistic choices, not rules of grammar or punctuation.

This passage also includes two em dashes. An em dash typically joins additional information to the original sentence or phrase, almost like an aside. You can imagine a stage actor leaning forward with hand held up to shield his mouth from the other cast members, saying the words that follow the em dash to the audience.

How to teach the passage: _____

Additional punctuation worthy of note and teaching:

- **Hyphen:** The hyphen is used when two words are meant to act as one in a sentence. In the opening phrase, “first-class” is hyphenated because they are necessary together (this is not the same as “tall, dark” or “modern, metallic”). Two adjectives next to each other are independent of one another and are separated by commas. In this case, “first-class” must be together to modify the “smoking carriage.” It’s not the “first smoking carriage” nor would one say it is a “class smoking carriage.” They must be together and function as a single adjective modifying the smoking carriage. Therefore they are hyphenated.
- **Italics:** *The Times* is a British newspaper and is therefore italicized just like you might put the title of a book in italics. Titles are mostly italicized or put in quotes now (underlining is rarely seen any more due to the availability of computer fonts as opposed to the rigidity of a typewriter key which can’t be modified).



Week Two

“Your conclusions are, I think, justified,” he said. “Ulick Norman Owen! In Miss Brent’s letter, though the signature of the surname is a mere scrawl the Christian names are reasonably clear—Una Nancy—in either case, you notice, the same initials. Ulick Norman Owen—Una Nancy Owen—each time, that is to say, U. N. Owen. Or by a slight stretch of fancy, UNKNOWN!”

Vera cried:

“But this is fantastic—mad!”

The judge nodded gently.

He said:

“Oh, yes. I’ve no doubt in my own mind that we have been invited here by a madman—probably a dangerous homicidal lunatic.”

(Chapter 3)

Week Two

Dialog: _____

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(Chapter 3)

Why this passage: _____

Dialog punctuation is most easily learned through repetition of copying it. In this passage, there are a couple of unconventional practices: “Vera cried:” and “He said:” are not in the same line as the quoted comments in the edition being used for this issue of the Boomerang. It’s possible that Christie meant to isolate the spoken lines from the speakers for effect.

What to note: _____

Christie is masterful here. Her penchant for word play is apparent. The reader, like the guests of Indian Island, is left to wonder where the hosts are—why hasn’t one or other of the Owenses made an appearance? As the judge unravels the first of many mysteries, he postulates that they have their answer in the very invitations issued to the guests: the Christian names (meaning the first names) all bear the same initials—U and N. When said together with the surname (last name), Owen,

a phonemic result gives a clue about the unusual conditions of this holiday. U N Owen can be pronounced “unknown,” which immediately carries with it an ominous quality leaving both readers and guests uneasy.

The only all caps in this passage (and perhaps the entire novel) are applied here for emphasis.

How to teach the passage: _____

There are more instances of the em dash (see Week One for more details about how those function). You can tell in this specific passage that they are used frequently to mirror speech as well. The em dash implies a pause while more information is being gathered or withheld or proffered.

This passage also gives good practice with capitalizing proper nouns, including middle names and titles (Miss).



Week Three

Tea! Blessed ordinary everyday afternoon tea! Philip Lombard made a cheery remark. Blore responded. Dr. Armstrong told a humorous story. Mr. Justice Wargrave, who ordinarily hated tea, sipped approvingly.

Into this relaxed atmosphere came Rogers.

And Rogers was upset. He said nervously and at random:

“Excuse me, sir, but does any one know what’s become of the bathroom curtain?”

(Chapter 10)

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Why this passage:

It seems requisite to include a passage about tea (particularly one that includes exclamation points!) when reading a novel by a British writer.

What to note:

Note the two exclamation points. They are both related to the role of tea in reestablishing peace. It’s an “excited” peace—the kind of peace you seek at the end of anxiety. The exclamation point has the effect of ending whatever anxious feeling had been building in the storyline. Yet ironically, the exclamation point is usually reserved for excitement. In this case, its use is for emphasis and finality.

Look how short-lived that peace is, though. Within a few moments repose for both characters and readers, we are plunged back into mystery and unease: the bathroom curtain is gone!

Christie is a master. She barely lets you rest before she “ups the stakes” and makes you move back to the edge of your seat.

The word “any one” is usually one word in American English (something to note).

How to teach the passage: _____

The actual punctuation of the passage is not difficult. Let’s look at style instead.

The two opening sentences (if they can be called that) are in fact exclamations. They erupt from within and are not the kind of thing that one utters aloud. In a world of chaos, the British always feel a certain tranquility re-emerge when they can make tea and sip it. Tea is the cure-all. I’m not sure we have anything in America that rivals the power of tea to restore order, goodwill and hope.

Christie continues by using terms that emphasize that restored order: “cheery remark” and “humorous story.” Even Justice Wargrave is described as usually hating tea (might this be a clue to his character that he doesn’t enjoy order, social convention and peace?), yet in this moment, he “sipped approvingly.” Each of these comments goes to establishing a respite from the turmoil of the preceding pages.

Yet she will not let us rest. Just as we settle down, Rogers comes “into the relaxed atmosphere. And...” That “and” is telling. It implies a hurriedness to the writing. It strings you along so that you can’t pause, you can’t simply rest in the relaxed atmosphere. An intruder on their peace has arrived, “and...”

Sure enough, he was upset and tosses out a question sure to disorient everyone again—both guests of Indian Island gathered around tea and the readers who were barely catching their breath.

This is how a good writer draws a reader into the plot. The literary term used for this action is called “upping the stakes.” Each time you feel a moment of resolution, a new problem is introduced that adds a layer of complexity. The reader should grow in frustration as he or she approaches the climax. That happens if the writer skillfully resolves minor challenges while intensifying the fundamental conflict that drives the narrative.



Week Four

I shall be found, laid neatly on my bed, shot through the forehead in accordance with the record kept by my fellow victims. Times of death cannot be stated with accuracy by the time our bodies are examined.

When the sea goes down, there will come from the mainland boats and men.
And they will find ten dead bodies and an unsolved problem on Indian Island.

Signed

Lawrence Wargrave

(Final Chapter)

Week Four

Closing Confession: _____

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Signed

Lawrence Wargrave

(Final Chapter)

Why I chose this passage: _____

The ending to this novel includes an epilogue (what comes after the strict narrative of the story of the ten people on Indian Island) and a final “message in a bottle” that has been sent to Scotland Yard, presumably some time after the end of the story. The confession accomplishes a couple of things: it ties up the loose ends that are left hanging in the narrative itself, and it gives Agatha Christie a chance to show off her powers of criminal imagination! We see in Wargrave the shadow of Christie and how she set about creating this particular story.

What to note: _____

One interesting feature of the tale is that Christie is, in essence, a moralist. She writes these murder mysteries which are as much an elaborate puzzle of clues and red herrings that lead to a neat and tidy solution, as they are stories of the inhumane act of murder.

To pull off a narrative that would accomplish all that the *Ten Little Indians* poem suggests, Christie had to find a moral ground for those murders. She appears uncomfortable with killing for its own sake or to slake the thirst for evil that more contemporary writers might indulge. As a result, Christie collects ten people who are “outside the touch of the law” yet who have, in their own right, caused the deaths of people close to them. Each one had justified to him or herself that they were not guilty of any crime. Yet Wargrave, Christie’s administrator of what is a version of divine justice, tallies up their sins of omission in some cases, of self-protection and greed in others. Through Wargrave, she renders a verdict: eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth. Those whose carelessness and selfishness results in the deaths of others must pay the ultimate price: with their lives.

Not only does Christie make the murders more palatable to us by showing her own justifications for why they must die, she makes Wargrave a character of ambiguous moral scruples. He is complex in that he works for the law. Yet he betrays a lust for killing and the sheer creativity involved in developing a complex murder mystery of his own. That he is a malevolent person must be addressed in the morally clear world of Christie and so she has him do away with himself at the end of the story in order to acknowledge just how wrong his vigilante justice ought to appear to us, the readers (who should not attempt anything similar).

It is also likely that Justice Wargrave’s name is deliberately a combination of “war” and “grave.” He has a soldier’s zeal about his task, but he is destined for the grave due to his morally flawed character.

How to teach this passage: _____

The ending of a book is often worth using for dictation. Also included here is the poem “*Ten Little Indians*” for copywork:

*Ten little Indian boys went out to dine;
One choked his little self and then there were nine.*

*Nine little Indian boys sat up very late;
One overslept himself and then there were eight.*

*Eight little Indian boys travelling in Devon;
One said he'd stay there and then there were seven.*

*Seven little Indian boys chopping up sticks;
One chopped himself in half and then there were six.*

*Six little Indian boys playing with a hive;
A bumblebee stung one and then there were five.*

*Five little Indian boys going in for law;
One got in Chancery and then there were four.*

*Four little Indian boys going out to sea;
A red herring swallowed one and then there were three.*

*Three little Indian boys walking in the zoo;
A big bear hugged one and then there were two.*

*Two Little Indian boys sitting in the sun;
One got frizzled up and then there was one.*

*One little Indian boy left all alone;
He went out and hanged himself and then there were none.*

Think Piece Questions

The following questions are designed to offer you ways to think about *And Then There Were None*. Use these questions as a jumping off place to help you delve more deeply into the story. Perhaps take one question per week during your Friday freewrite time to attempt to answer the questions. The finished product need not be perfectly refined. The objective of this writing is to stimulate reflection and to help you give language to your thoughts. It's perfectly acceptable to select the questions to write about (perhaps you choose to write about half of them).

If you find it daunting to write about these topics at first, use them for conversation starters with your parents or a sibling who has read the books. Go out for shakes and talk about the novel in these terms. As you get comfortable talking through a book, eventually try answering one of the questions in writing.

Questions:

1. On page 15, Christie uses a drunken old man to foreshadow the coming tone of the whole narrative: "There's a squall ahead. I can *smell* it." Then this same man points a finger at Mr. Blore and says: "I'm talking to *you*, young man. The day of judgment is very close at hand." Judgment Day is a motif repeated throughout the story. What is the "Day of Judgment" and at whose hands is judgment meted out according to that definition? How is Christie using the idea of a "Judgment Day" to justify (in some sense) the murders of these ten people?
2. On page 42, a disembodied voice (a gramophone recording) calls each member of the party to account by enumerating their hidden sins openly. Each person is accused of murder of some kind. Make a list of the characters and then narrate what sort of murder each one is responsible for. Are they all of similar culpability? How does each person deal with guilt (or not!) related to the deaths they caused or had a hand in? In a court of law, could any of these be tried for murder? Lastly, what authority does the voice have in the lives of these characters? How might it be analogous to God's voice on Judgment Day?
3. What is a "Swan Song" (page 49) and how does that title of the gramophone record match the over-arching theme of the story?

4. Read the following quote:

If this had been an old house, with creaking wood and dark shadows, and heavily paneled walls, there might have been an eerie feeling. But this house was the essence of modernity. There were no dark corners—no possible sliding panels—it was flooded with electric light—everything was new and bright and shining. There was nothing hidden in this house, nothing concealed. It had no atmosphere about it.

How might this house symbolize heaven? Christie uses the house metaphorically to represent a place of revelation (no secrets, bright, well-lit, no atmosphere). Why?

5. General MacArthur recognizes that what he did to Richmond can be compared to what happened with King David and Uriah. What is that comparison? How are they the same? How different? (Page 77)
6. Vera and Emily are both responsible for deaths without having deliberately caused them, according to Wargrave (and Christie). What similarities are there in their stories? How do they excuse themselves? Is Emily as responsible for Beatrice's death as Vera feels for Cyril's? On what grounds does Emily feel justified and not guilty for Beatrice's death?
7. What role does "class" play in the story? Christie's England in the 1930's was still highly beholden to the class structure. Servants were "less human" than nobility and those with money. Vera Claythorne, for instance, felt trapped by the way inherited money transferred generation to generation, preventing her from marrying the man she loved (Hugo) which led to her desperate act of neglect toward Cyril. Philip Lombard readily admits to leaving 21 men in East Africa to die because he needs the rations for himself and a friend. On page 61, he says: "And natives don't mind dying, you know. They don't feel about it as Europeans do." Why might he say this? What feeling does he assign to Europeans that he imagines is not present in "natives" (indigenous Africans)? How does enforcing class distinctions act as a barrier to conscience?
8. How does the poem "Ten Little Indians" create a framework for the story? Tie each murder to the poem. Does Wargrave kill everyone or not? Do you find the overall description of how the plot was conceived and executed believable (plausible)? Why or why not?

Golden Lines

Each month, select one favorite passage from the book to keep in a notebook of golden lines. You might want to pick two this month (one from each story). You'll pick a passage, copy it into a notebook and then write the date you picked it and the location in the book (which chapter and page number). Then jot down a sentence or two about why the passage is meaningful to you.

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