

THE WORLD OF AGATHA CHRISTIE

READ

Extracts from Poirot
and Marple stories

SOLVE

Poisonous puzzles

EXPLORE

Deadly trivia

DELVE

Into Agatha's
autobiography



Poison

A FACT FILE

☞ Not all chemicals in Christie's works are poisons. Some are used to "drug" the victim, produce alterations in behaviour, cause addiction, or serve as medication.

Torre Abbey, Torbay's most historic building, has a potent plants garden, dedicated to the flora in Agatha Christie's works. The sources for cyanide, morphine and ricin, are just a few of the plants that can be found in the gardens.

☞ Nicotine can kill in as little as four minutes but if the patient (or victim) is with medical assistance, there are a few antidotes. Activated charcoal can absorb nicotine in the stomach but an injection of atropine is the most effective.

Swallowing a castor seed whole is unlikely to prove fatal as the outer shell of the seed is so tough that it prevents the poisonous ricin from being released. The first real-life murder by ricin in Britain occurred in 1978, after Christie had used it to kill off one of her characters.

In preparation for her apothecary examinations, Agatha and a colleague practised the Marsh test using their 'Cona' coffee machine, and blew it up in the process.

☞ Peppers, aubergines, tomatoes and potatoes come from the same family of plants as nicotine. These edible produce actually contain nicotine but at a far lower concentration making them safe to consume.

Christie didn't always use poisons from the real world. Calmo is just one of the fictional drugs she created, from *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* - have you spotted any others? Try reading *A Caribbean Mystery* or *Passenger to Frankfurt*.

☞ When people refer to arsenic as a poison they are usually referring to 'white arsenic' or arsenic trioxide: As₂O₃.

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These facts are from the following books: *A is for Arsenic* by Katherine Harkup, *The Poisonous Pen of Agatha Christie* by Michael C. Gerald and *Agatha Christie's Complete Secret Notebooks* by John Curran.

Three Act Tragedy

AN EXTRACT [1934]

'May I make a suggestion? Mr Babbington was taken ill a very few moments after entering the room and just after drinking his cocktail. Now, I did happen to notice he made a wry face when drinking. I imagined because he was unused to the taste. But supposing that Sir Bartholomew's tentative suggestion is correct—that Mr Babbington may for some reason have wished to commit suicide. That does strike me as just possible, whereas the suggestion of murder seems quite ridiculous. 'I feel that it is possible, though not probable, that Mr Babbington introduced something into that glass unseen by us.

'Now I see that nothing has yet been touched in this room. The cocktail glasses are exactly where they were.

This is Mr Babbington's. I know, because I was sitting here talking to him. I suggest that Sir Bartholomew should get the glass analysed—that can be done quite quietly and without causing any "talk".'

Sir Bartholomew rose and picked up the glass. 'Right,' he said. 'I'll humour you so far, Charles, and I'll bet you ten pounds to one that there's nothing in it but honest-to-God gin and vermouth.'

'Done,' said Sir Charles.

Then he added with a rueful smile:

'You know, Tollie, you are partly responsible for my flights of fancy.'

'I?'

'Yes, with your talk of crime this morning.

You said this man, Hercule Poirot, was a kind of stormy petrel, that where he went crimes

'I feel that it is possible, though not probable, that Mr Babbington introduced something into that glass unseen by us.'

followed. No sooner does he arrive than we have a suspiciously sudden death. Of course my thoughts fly to murder at once.'

'I wonder,' said Mr Satterthwaite, and stopped. 'Yes,' said Charles Cartwright. 'I'd thought of that. What do you think, Tollie? Could we ask him what he thinks of it all? Is it etiquette, I mean?'

'A nice point,' murmured Mr Satterthwaite. 'I know medical etiquette, but I'm hanged if I know anything about the etiquette of detection.'

'You can't ask a professional singer to sing,' murmured Mr Satterthwaite. 'Can one ask a professional detective to detect? Yes, a very nice point.'

'Just an opinion,' said Sir Charles.

There was a gentle tap on the door, and Hercule Poirot's face appeared, peering in with an apologetic expression.

'Come in, man,' cried Sir Charles, springing up. 'We were just talking of you.'

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Poison

A READING LIST

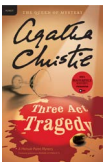


THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES [1920]

Agatha Christie's first detective novel begins with Captain Hastings being sent back to England after sustaining an injury in the First World War. He is invited by his old

friend, John Cavendish, to spend some time at their beautiful country house, Styles Court, where he meets Mrs Inglethorp and her new husband, Alfred. Despite the idyllic surroundings, Mrs Inglethorp is found poisoned, and suspicions begin to arise amongst the family members. Thankfully Hercule Poirot is on hand to investigate.

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THREE ACT TRAGEDY [1934]

Sir Charles Cartwright's dinner party is going well - the guests are talking, and the drinks are flowing, that is until the vicar drops down dead after sipping on

his cocktail. Despite his death being declared as natural, Sir Charles suspects foul play and sends for the cocktail glass to be analysed, but no traces of poison can be found. So, who killed the vicar, how did they administer the fatal poison and even more puzzling, why?

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DEATH IN THE CLOUDS [1935]

Poirot's return flight from France doesn't go to plan, when a fellow passenger is killed on board. Not content with being on the scene,

Christie also makes the Detective a major suspect in this complicated case. A poisoned blowpipe is located under Poirot's seat, and he must work out how the fatal crime took place without witnesses in order to clear his name.

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MURDER IS EASY [1939]

Accidents can be fatal... But so too, can arsenic. When Luke Fitzwilliam returns to England, he doesn't have much of a plan for the future. A chance meeting with an eccentric

stranger leads him to a small, and seemingly unlucky, village. Are all these deaths just an unfortunate coincidence, or is a murderer at work in Wychwood under Ashe? An excellent standalone story from the Queen of Crime.

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FIVE LITTLE PIGS [1942]

Sixteen years after a murder was committed, Poirot is asked to get to the bottom of it. Carla's birth mother was charged with killing her husband, and died in

prison, but not before penning a note proclaiming her innocence. By reassembling the five living witnesses, the Detective intends to discover who put the poison in the renowned artist Amyas Crale's beer all those years ago...

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SPARKLING CYANIDE [1945]

Rosemary Barton will never be forgotten. She was a sister, a wife, a friend but evidently, she was also someone's enemy. Tonight, six people sit down to dinner

with a sprig of "rosemary for remembrance", at the very table she died a year ago today. Could this be a civilised dinner or will history be tempted to repeat itself?

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CROOKED HOUSE [1945]

A house full of suspects. A murder method provided by the victim himself. It's time to meet the Leonides family, a large and complicated group who share the

onymous residence. Greek-born Aristide made his fortune in the UK, and provides generously for those who live with him, but now he has been poisoned the family suspect someone still wasn't happy with their lot. Could it be his second-wife, who was five decades his junior? It's up to a family insider to find out.

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A POCKET FULL OF RYE [1953]

Patriarch of his family, Rex Fortescue meets an agonising end when he takes a sip of his morning cup of tea at his desk. Falling into substantial fortune upon his death,

suspicions naturally turn towards his wife - that is until she is also found dead. But perhaps most puzzling of all, is the handful of rye found in Rex Fortescue's jacket pocket. It is down to Miss Marple to decipher the puzzling clues that are stumping Scotland Yard's finest and catch the guilty party.

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THE PALE HORSE [1961]

Father Gorman hears a death-bed confession, before being killed in the street. He has, in his possession, a list of names which attracts the attention

of the police, and our protagonist Mark Easterbrook. The list is linked to a spate of recent deaths, a suspicious trio of witches, and a very creepy village. Can Ariadne Oliver help to uncover an unusual murder methodology? This story is credited with saving at least two lives, when Christie fans recalled the plot of the book.

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THE MIRROR CRACK'D FROM SIDE TO SIDE [1962]

At a charity fete in Gossington Hall, hosted by film star Marina Gregg, cocktails are flowing,

and guests are mingling. But moments after being welcomed, Heather Badcock is dead, killed from ingesting a poisoned cocktail. Gossip spreads quickly in St Mary Mead, and it isn't long before people suspect that the intended victim of the fatal drink was actually Marina. But whilst the police begin questioning the party's guests, Miss Marple conducts her own investigations...

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We have focused on the novels for this list, but there are plenty of great short story collections featuring deadly poisons too.

Have we missed off your favourite story featuring poison? Let us know your top pick via our social media channels.

Poison

A WORD SEARCH

F F R A D T A X I N E U A R
Z U Z I E R R I N O M X I R
M N E H I P S C F E O J E S
O M O N K S H O O D G O O T
R T H A L L I U M Y Y D Q R
P Q A B E L L A D O N N A Y
H Q J R D I G I T A L I S C
I N D E S E R I N E A A R H
N O W R Y E V O P P A I Q N
E R R C Y A N I D E D T F I
H E M L O C K I D O P V T N
V E R O N A L W C P C Y A E
N I Z Y O E F P E T D Z T D

Can you locate the following deadly poisons?

ARSENIC
BELLADONNA
CYANIDE
DIGITALIS
ESERINE
HEMLOCK

MONKSHOOD
MORPHINE
STRYCHNINE
TAXINE
THALLIUM
VERONAL

Ariadne Oliver

"Good old-fashioned rat poison or arsenic is good enough for me. Or the reliable blunt instrument."

The Pale Horse, Agatha Christie

A Pocket Full of Rye

AN EXTRACT [1953]

Mr Fortescue was less impressive than he should have been to match the room, but he did his best. He was a large flabby man with a gleaming bald head. It was his affectation to wear loosely cut country tweeds in his city office. He was frowning down at some papers on his desk when Miss Grosvenor glided up to him in her swanlike manner. Placing the tray on the desk at his elbow, she murmured in a low impersonal voice, 'Your tea, Mr Fortescue,' and withdrew. Mr Fortescue's contribution to the ritual was a grunt. Seated at her own desk again Miss Grosvenor proceeded with the business in hand. She made two telephone calls, corrected some letters that were lying there typed ready for Mr Fortescue to sign and took one incoming call. 'Ay'm afraid it's impossible just now,' she said in haughty accents. 'Mr Fortescue is in conference.' As she laid down the receiver she glanced at the clock. It was ten minutes past eleven. It was just then that an unusual sound penetrated through the almost sound-proof door of Mr Fortescue's office.

Muffled, it was yet fully recognizable, a strangled agonized cry. At the same moment the buzzer on Miss Grosvenor's desk sounded in a long-drawn frenzied summons. Miss Grosvenor, startled for a moment into complete immobility, rose uncertainly to her feet. Confronted by the unexpected, her poise was shaken. However, she moved towards Mr Fortescue's door in her usual statuesque fashion, tapped and entered. What she saw

It was just then that an unusual sound penetrated through the almost sound-proof door of Mr Fortescue's office.

upset her poise still further. Her employer behind his desk seemed contorted with agony. His convulsive movements were alarming to watch. Miss Grosvenor said, 'Oh dear, Mr Fortescue, are you ill?' and was immediately conscious of the idiocy of the question. There was no doubt but that Mr Fortescue was very seriously ill. Even as she came up to him, his body was convulsed in a painful spasmodic movement. Words came out in jerky gasps. 'Tea—what the hell—you put in the tea—get help—quick get a doctor—'

Miss Grosvenor fled from the room. She was no longer the supercilious blonde secretary—she was a thoroughly frightened woman who had lost her head. She came running into the typists' office crying out: 'Mr Fortescue's having a fit—he's dying—we must get a doctor—he looks awful—I'm sure he's dying.'

A Pocket Full of Rye Copyright © 1953 Agatha Christie Limited. All rights reserved.

Poison

A QUIZ

Sad Cypress begins with a court case. Elinor Carlisle is accused of murdering the victim using which sandwich filling?

- A Egg and Cress
- B Fish Paste
- C Smoked Salmon
- D Ham and Cheese

True or False: The most common murder method in Agatha Christie's stories is poison.

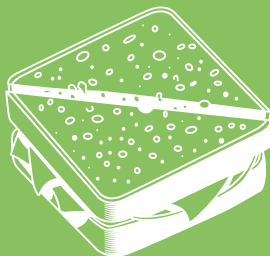
Which poison was used to murder all three victims in *Three Act Tragedy*?

- A Taxine
- B Morphine
- C Nicotine
- D Arsenic

Who, after drinking from a cyanide-laced glass, was the first victim in *And Then There Were None*?

- A Tony Marston
- B John MacArthur
- C Ethel Rogers
- D Emily Brent

True or False: Bobby was poisoned with morphine in *Why Didn't They Ask Evans*?



Who was accused of placing the conium in Amyas Crale's beer in *Five Little Pigs*?

- A Caroline Crale
- B Meredith Blake
- C Elsa Greer
- D Cecilia Williams

In which Miss Marple story is the patriarch suspicious he is being poisoned by a family member?

- A *The Moving Finger*
- B *4.50 from Paddington*
- C *Nemesis*
- D *The Body in the Library*

To which beverage does the titular drink of *Sparkling Cyanide* refer?

- A Cider
- B Water
- C Beer
- D Champagne

ANSWERS: 1. B, 2. TRUE, 3. C, 4. A, 5. TRUE, 6. A, 7. B, 8. D

An Autobiography

AN EXTRACT [1977]

As part of my preparation for my examination at Apothecaries Hall, it was arranged that I should have a little outside instruction from a proper commercial chemist. One of the principal pharmacists in Torquay was gracious enough to say that I could come in on certain Sundays and that he would give me instruction. I arrived meek and frightened, anxious to learn.

A chemist's shop, the first time that you go behind the scenes, is a revelation. Being amateurs in our hospital work, we measured every bottle of medicine with the utmost accuracy. When the doctor prescribed twenty grains of bismuth carbonate to a dose, exactly twenty grains the patient got. Since we were amateurs, I think this was a good thing, but I imagine that any chemist who has done his five years, and got his minor pharmaceutical degree, knows his stuff in the same way as a good cook knows hers. He tosses in portions from the various stock bottles with the utmost confidence, without bothering to measure or weigh at all. He measures his poisons or dangerous drugs carefully, of course, but the harmless stuff goes in in the approximate dollops. Colouring and flavouring are added in much the same way.

He measures his poisons or dangerous drugs carefully, of course, but the harmless stuff goes in in the approximate dollops.

This sometimes results in the patients coming back and complaining that their medicine is a different colour from last time. 'It is a deep pink I have as a rule, not this pale pink,' or 'This doesn't taste right; it is the peppermint mixture I have - a nice peppermint mixture, not nasty, sweet, sickly stuff.' Then chloroform water has clearly been added instead of peppermint water.

The majority of patients in the out-patient department at University College Hospital, where I worked in 1948, were particular as to the exact colour and taste of their preparations. I remember an old Irish woman who leant into the dispensary window, pressed half-a-crown

into my palm, and murmured: 'Make it double strong, dearie, will you? Plenty of peppermint, double strong.' I returned her the half-a-crown, saying griggishly that we didn't accept that sort

of thing, and added that she had to have the medicine exactly as the doctor had ordered it. I did, however, give her an extra dollop of peppermint water, since it could not possibly do her any harm and she enjoyed it so much.

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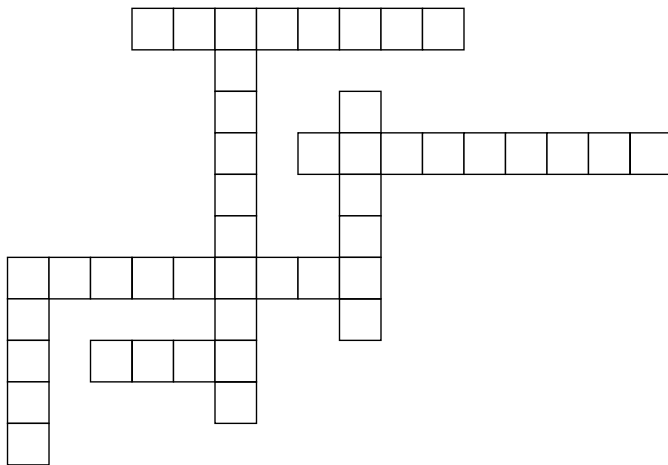
Poisoned Objects

THE AGA-GRAMS

Unscramble these anagrams below to reveal poisoned objects from the Christie canon and then finish the kriss kross with them.

EAKC
CAGPNAEHM
COLAHSECTO
ACKIOLTC

COAOC
EFCEOF
CRSVSENEO



Dr. Quimper

"If Miss Eyelesbarrow is feeding the family arsenic in their curry, she's doing it for a reason."

4.50 from *Paddington*, Agatha Christie

Crooked House

AN EXTRACT [1949]

'This is a bad business, Charles Hayward,' she said. She was looking towards the house. 'What do the police think about it? Suppose I mustn't ask you that. Seems odd to think of Aristide being poisoned. For that matter it seems odd to think of him being dead. I never liked him—never! But I can't get used to the idea of his being dead... Makes the house seem so—empty.' I said nothing. For all her curt way of speech, Edith de Haviland seemed in a reminiscent mood.

'Was thinking this morning—I've lived here a long time. Over forty years. Came here when my sister died. He asked me to. Seven children—and the youngest only a year old... Couldn't leave 'em to be brought up by their father, could I? An impossible marriage, of course. I always felt Marcia must have been—well—bewitched. He gave me a free hand—I will say that. Nurses, governesses, school... 'And you've been here ever since?' I murmured. 'Yes. Queer in a way... I could have left, I suppose, when the children grew up and married... I suppose, really, I'd got interested in the garden. And then there was Philip. If a man marries an actress he can't expect to have any home life. Don't know why actresses have children. As soon as a baby's born they rush off and play in Repertory in Edinburgh or somewhere as remote as possible. Philip did the sensible thing—moved in here with his books.' 'What does Philip Leonides do?' 'Writes books. Can't think why. Nobody wants to read them. All about obscure historical details. You've never even heard of them, have you?' I admitted it.

*I never liked him—never!
But I can't get used to the
idea of his being dead...
Makes the house seem
so—empty.'*

'Too much money, that's what he's had,' said Miss de Haviland. 'Most people have to stop being cranks and earn a living.' 'Don't his books pay?' 'Of course not. He's supposed to be a great authority on certain periods and all that. But he doesn't have to make his books pay—Aristide settled something like a hundred thousand pounds—something quite fantastic—on him! To avoid death duties! Aristide made them all financially independent. Roger runs Associated Catering—Sophia has a very handsome allowance. The children's money is in trust for them.' 'So no one gains particularly by his death?' She threw me a strange glance. 'Yes, they do. They all get more money. But they could probably have had it, if they asked for it, anyway.' 'Have you any idea who poisoned him, Miss de Haviland?' She replied characteristically: 'No, indeed I haven't.'

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