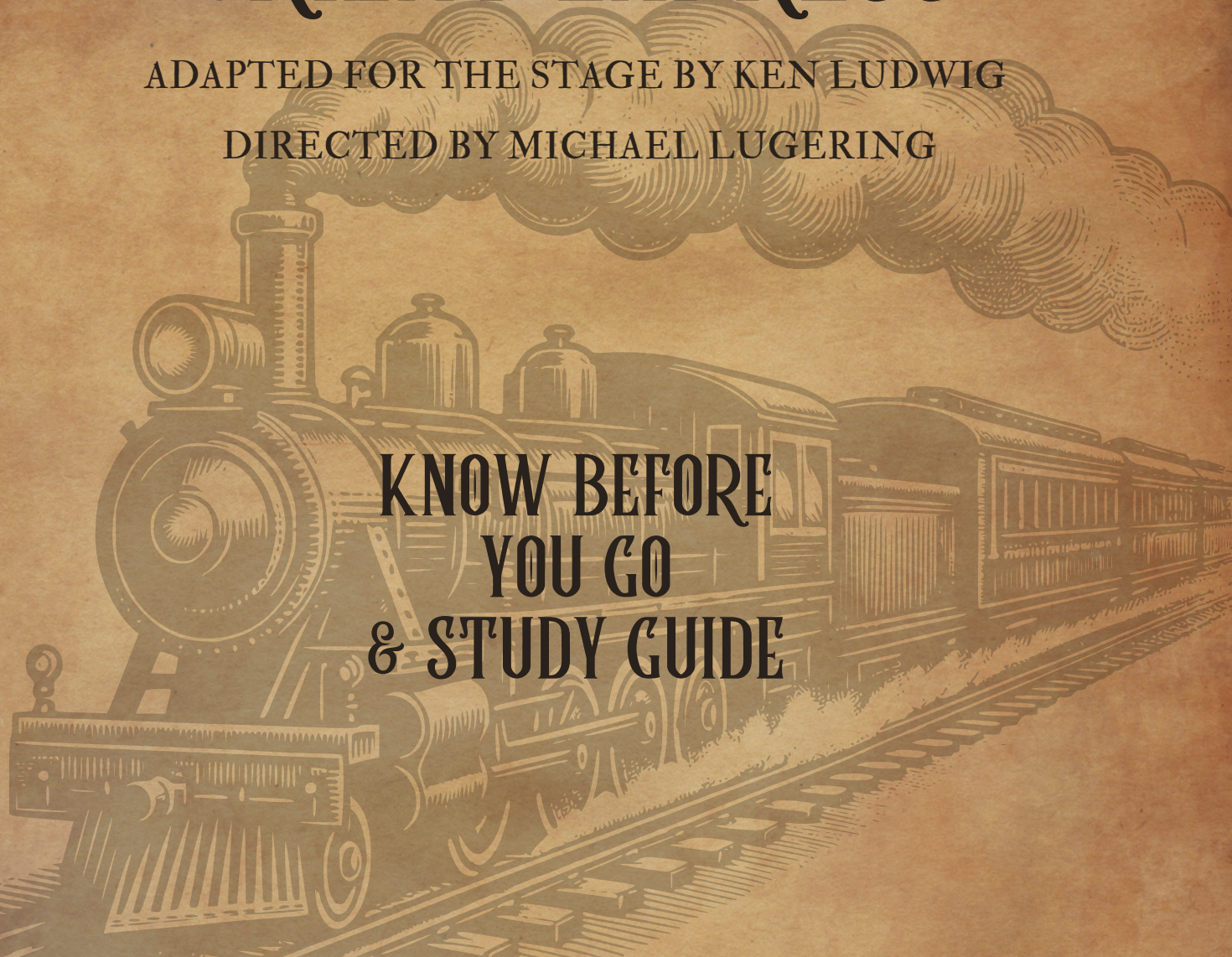


AGATHA CHRISTIE

# MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY KEN LUDWIG

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL LUGERING



KNOW BEFORE  
YOU GO  
& STUDY GUIDE

PRESENTED BY THE NEVADA  
CONSERVATORY THEATRE

MAY 02 - 11, 2025

Kirsten Brandt  
Executive Director (NCT)  
Produced by the Department of Theatre

**nct** NEVADA  
CONSERVATORY  
THEATRE

PRESENTS

Agatha Christie

# MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Adapted for the stage by Ken Ludwig

with

Director  
Michael Lugering

Scenic/Projection Design  
Andrew Taylor+

Lighting Design  
Paige Borak+

Costume Design  
Katie Gould+

Technical Direction  
Brooke Oteri+

Sound Designer  
Mary Alice DiRienzo

Fight and Intimacy Coordinator  
Sean Boyd

Production Stage Manager  
Cameron Cox+

+Member of the MFA Professional Training Program with the Nevada Conservatory Theatre

*The run time of this performance is approximately 2 hours, with one intermission*



May 1 - May 11, 2025  
Judy Bayley Theatre  
UNLV.EDU - (702) 895-ARTS

*Thank you for supporting NCT!*

# WELCOME ABOARD...

A luxurious train. A shocking murder. Eleven strangers stranded in a snowstorm—and someone on board is a killer.

When the lavish Orient Express grinds to a halt in the dead of winter, the tranquil journey quickly turns deadly. A passenger is found stabbed in his compartment, and the killer remains on board. It falls to the brilliant detective Hercule Poirot to unravel the clues and expose the truth before the murderer strikes again.

With a range of suspects—from an alluring countess and a volatile Russian princess to a secretive governess and a colorful American tourist—every detail matters, and no one is above suspicion.



Ken Ludwig's adaptation of this iconic Agatha Christie's mystery is a thrilling blend of old-world glamour, high-stakes tension, and razor-sharp storytelling.

Step aboard ... if you dare.

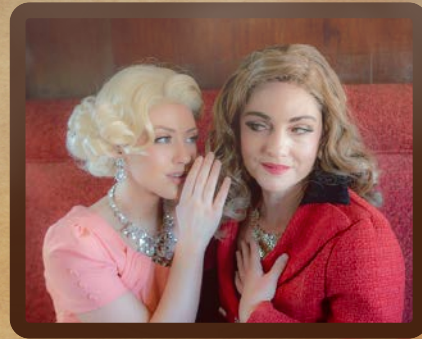
Pictured above: Some of the cast of NCT's 2025 production of MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS.  
Photo by Shahab Zargari.

# CONTENT NOTICE

In order to best prepare everyone for this live theatrical experience, we'd like to advise all audience members that MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS contains some content that some people may find objectionable. While the show is generally appropriate for teen and adult audiences, it contains the following content that some viewers may wish to be aware of:

- **Violent Content:** The story centers around a murder and includes discussions of violence and retribution. Additionally, the murder of a child occurs offstage and is later described in dialogue, with references to past trauma and a kidnapping.
- **Mild Language:** The script contains a few instances of period-appropriate strong language or exclamations.
- **Emotional Themes:** The play explores complex emotional themes such as grief, loss, revenge, and moral ambiguity.
- **Use of Weapons:** A (prop) gun is visible onstage and briefly fired in a non-graphic, stylized moment.
- **Smoking and Alcohol Use:** Some characters are seen smoking and/or drinking alcohol.
- **Mild Romantic Activity:** The play features kissing and suggested sexual situations.

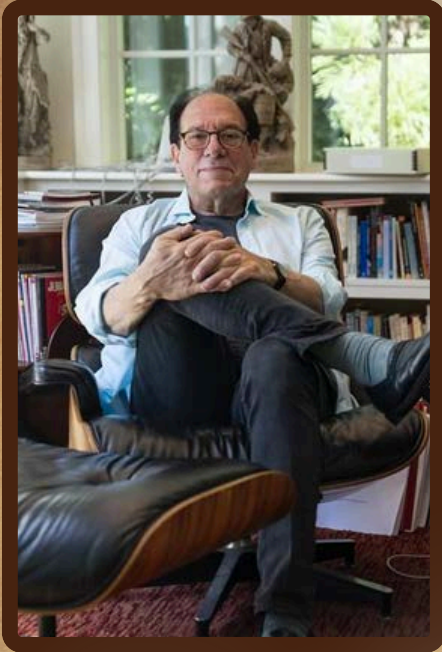
With all of this said, please know that this production does NOT include graphic imagery or explicit content.



Pictured above left: Nick Case as Bouc; Andrew Trevino as MacQueen; Drew Callahan as Arbuthnot; and Max Lardent as Poirot.  
Pictured above right: JoAnn Birt as Countess Andreyne and Kate Critchfield as Mrs. Hubbard.  
Photos by Shahab Zargari.

# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

## KEN LUDWIG



Ken Ludwig is an award-winning playwright whose work has been celebrated on Broadway, in London's West End, and on stages around the globe. He is particularly known for comedic brilliance. His first Broadway play, *LEND ME A TENOR*, won three Tony Awards and was called "one of the classic comedies of the 20th century" by *The Washington Post*. He followed that with the musical *CRAZY FOR YOU*, which won the Tony Award for Best Musical and solidified his reputation as one of America's foremost comedic playwrights.

Ludwig's extensive body of work includes *MOON OVER BUFFALO*, *LEADING LADIES*, *BASKERVILLE: A SHERLOCK HOLMES MYSTERY*, *TWENTIETH CENTURY*, and *SHERWOOD: THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD*. His plays have been produced in over 30 countries and translated into more than 20 languages. He's also penned librettos for opera, adaptations for Shakespeare festivals, and plays for family audiences, showcasing his extraordinary range.

More recently, Ludwig has gained acclaim for his stylish stage adaptations of literary classics, including, of course, *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*. His version of this classic murder mystery was written with the approval of the Agatha Christie Estate. Ludwig balanced the story's classic suspense with his own signature wit and theatrical style, resulting in a fast-paced, stylish whodunit that captures the glamour of the original novel while breathing new life into its iconic characters. With high stakes and a touch of humor, Ludwig's adaptation is called a loving homage to the "Queen of Crime."

# MEET THE AUTHOR

## AGATHA CHRISTIE

Agatha Christie (1890–1976), who wrote *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS* as a novel in 1933, is one of the most celebrated and best-selling authors in history, known around the world as the “Queen of Crime.” Throughout her career, she wrote 66 detective novels, 14 short story collections, and the world’s longest-running play, *THE MOUSETRAP*. Her works have sold more than two billion copies worldwide, and have been translated into over 100 languages. She is known to have reshaped the mystery genre for generations of readers.



## FUN FACT

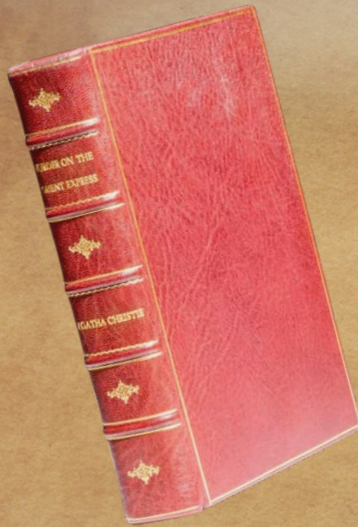
**SHE WAS A PHARMACIST—SO SHE KNEW HER POISONS! DURING BOTH WORLD WARS, CHRISTIE WORKED IN HOSPITAL DISPENSARIES, WHICH GAVE HER A DEEP KNOWLEDGE OF CHEMISTRY AND TOXIC SUBSTANCES. THAT'S WHY SO MANY OF HER FICTIONAL MURDERS ARE CHILLINGLY ACCURATE WHEN IT COMES TO POISONS.**

One of Christie’s most iconic sleuths is the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, featured in *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*. He was written into more than 30 of her novels, and has become a symbol of detective fiction itself. Her work is particularly known for its satisfying twists that reveal hidden motives and unexpected truths.

Today, her legacy endures not only through her books, but also through countless stage and screen adaptations, reminding us that mystery, when told well, never goes out of style.

# HISTORY OF THE STORY

## THE NOVEL



Agatha Christie's *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS* was first published in the United Kingdom in 1934. It quickly became one of her most famous and best-loved works, featuring her iconic Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot. Christie was inspired by her own travels on the luxurious Orient Express train and by real-life events, including the infamous Lindbergh baby kidnapping of 1932.

The novel captivated readers with its locked-room mystery format (in which a crime is seemingly impossible because of an inability for suspects to have come in or out of the crime scene), glamorous international suspects, and shocking twist ending—which challenged the conventions of detective fiction at the time.

### FILM AND TELEVISION ADAPTATIONS

#### 1974 Film

- Albert Finney played Poirot, joined by stars like Lauren Bacall, Ingrid Bergman (who won an Oscar), Sean Connery, and Vanessa Redgrave.
- It was critically acclaimed and helped cement the story's place in pop culture.

#### 2001 TV Version

- A made-for-TV movie starring Alfred Molina as Poirot.
- This version took some modern liberties and was less faithful to the novel.

#### 2010 ITV Series Adaptation

- Part of the long-running British series *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, starring David Suchet.

#### 2017 Feature Film

- Directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh as Poirot (with a notably extravagant mustache!).
- It featured dazzling visuals and updated action, introducing the story to a new generation of moviegoers.

# HISTORY OF THE STORY

## THE LINDBERGH KIDNAPPING


In 1932, the United States was shaken by what was called “the crime of the century”—the kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh Jr., the 20-month-old son of famous aviator Charles Lindbergh. On the night of March 1, the baby was taken from his bedroom in the Lindbergh family home in New Jersey. There was a ransom note left at the scene, but despite the ransom being paid, the child was tragically found dead weeks later.

After a long investigation, a German immigrant named Bruno Richard Hauptmann was arrested, tried, and ultimately executed for the crime in 1936. But many people at the time believed the case was more complicated—and possibly involved others who were never caught. The case left the public heartbroken, angry, and fascinated by questions of justice.

Agatha Christie was deeply affected by the Lindbergh case, and she based the backstory of Daisy Armstrong in *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS* after Charles Lindbergh Jr. The emotional weight of the crime in the story reflects the public outrage and grief that surrounded the Lindbergh case.

## 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

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION PROMPT:

Christie explores ideas of justice and morality, and what people might do when they think the legal system has failed. What are the risks and consequences of taking the law into your own hands? Do you think justice and the law are always the same thing?

# HISTORY OF THE STORY

## THE REAL-LIFE ORIENT EXPRESS

Believe it or not, The Orient Express wasn't just a setting for mystery—it was a real, luxurious train that captured the imagination of travelers across Europe for more than a century.

Launched in 1883 by the Belgian company Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits, the original Orient Express ran from Paris to Istanbul, passing through cities like Vienna, Budapest, and Bucharest. It quickly became a symbol of elegance and adventure, known for its lavish sleeping cars, gourmet meals, and elite passengers—from royalty to spies to diplomats.

In its heyday, riding the Orient Express was a glamorous, once-in-a-lifetime experience. It offered more than just travel—it promised intrigue, romance, and international flair. Though the original route ceased operation in the late 20th century, the Orient Express name lives on through modern luxury trains that continue to evoke the charm and mystery of a bygone era.



### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION PROMPT:

The real-life Orient Express was more than just a train—it was a symbol of luxury, mystery, and international travel. Why do you think Agatha Christie chose it as the setting for her story? How can a setting shape the mood, tone, or themes of a mystery? What makes certain locations (like trains, mansions, or small towns) so effective for mystery stories?

# DRAMATURG'S NOTE

## PUZZLING OVER MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS



When dramaturgs write an accompanying note for a show it is assumed that they will enlighten the audience by explaining certain patterns, ideas, or hidden meanings. However, with that pompous, know-it-all Belgian detective Hercule Poirot around, the poor dramaturg just cannot compete. In other words, dear spectators, this time I engage YOU to find as many answers as you can to questions you maybe didn't even know to ask.

**Spoiler alert:** some of the following could lead you to solve the murder mystery before Poirot, others are just to make you think, others still... just to throw you off the scent. Here we go!

- Who's the little girl and who's that "hulking man" in the shadows?
- Why does the Orient Express travel from "the exotic city of Istanbul" to Western Europe and not vice versa in this play?
- Do you believe that this case was the most difficult of Poirot's career or is he just exaggerating to boast of his achievement?
- Why does Colonel Arbuthnot identify Poirot as likely a "damned foreigner who probably doesn't even speak English"? How is Poirot dressed or otherwise signaling his "foreignness" if several other characters are also foreigners?
- Why is it that the Orient Express's first class is suddenly sold out?
- Why does Poirot sense that something is wrong, that one of the passengers doesn't fit in, and something fatal is about to occur?
- Why do both the Countess and Poirot agree on the time of the murdered man's death, but then something doesn't add up in the timing?
- Why does Bouc state that the passengers "are all characters"?
- Why are there at least four Shakespearean references in the play?

Pictured above: Stebos, resident dramaturg for NCT and professor for UNLV.

# DRAMATURG'S NOTE

## PUZZLING OVER MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

- Why does Greta reminisce about an African train trip when she found herself sitting beside an old goat? Does the goat remind you of any sacrificial rites?
- Why does Poirot decline Mr. Ratchett's case even after his offer goes from 5,000 to 10,000 dollars?
- Why does Poirot ask for a plan of the coach and everyone's passports?
- Why is it important that Poirot speaks several foreign languages?
- Why does Poirot need to switch gears from psychology to science to find the solution to the mystery?
- Why is the snow so important for Poirot's resolution of the case?

Thus, put on your detective spectacles and watch the show with your eyes peeled! And, sorry, don't expect me to fill in the blanks: if you cannot find a clue, ask Poirot (if you can catch him), or the director, or the actors or someone else, just not this puzzled dramaturg!

-- Stebos



Pictured above: Some of the cast of NCT's 2025 production of MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS.  
Photo by Shahab Zargari.

# WHAT'S A MURDER MYSTERY?

Murder mysteries can be found all over—in books, on TV, in movies, and on stage.

The murder mystery genre is all about solving a crime—usually a murder—by uncovering clues, piecing together evidence, and figuring out whodunit. These stories often follow a detective, either professional or amateur, as they try to unravel the truth behind a suspicious death. Along the way, readers or audiences meet a cast of characters, each with their own secrets, motives, and alibis.



## FUN FACT

THE TERM “WHODUNIT” WAS FIRST USED IN THE 1930S TO DESCRIBE MYSTERY STORIES WHERE THE READER OR AUDIENCE TRIES TO FIGURE OUT THE IDENTITY OF THE KILLER BEFORE THE DETECTIVE DOES. IT’S A PLAYFUL MASH-UP OF “WHO HAS DONE IT?”—AND IT PERFECTLY CAPTURES THE CHALLENGE OF A GOOD MYSTERY!

It's like a puzzle wrapped in suspense—every clue, conversation, and strange little detail might matter. The audience follows along, picking up hints and trying to solve the mystery before the big reveal at the end. A good murder mystery invites the audience to become part of the investigation—and to ask big questions about truth, justice, and human nature.

Murder mysteries combine suspense, character drama, and intellectual challenge. They're not just about crime—they're about uncovering hidden truths.

# MEET YOUR DETECTIVE HERCULE POIROT



Hercule Poirot, created by Agatha Christie, is one of the most iconic detectives in literary history. He is featured in over 30 novels and more than 50 short stories. A retired Belgian police officer turned private detective, Poirot is instantly recognizable for his famously elaborate mustache. With his sharp mind and love of order and logic, Poirot solves crimes not with brute force but by using the power of rational thought and observation.

What sets Poirot apart from other fictional detectives is his personality. He's brilliant, but also charmingly vain, extremely proper, and deeply committed to justice. He often comes across as fussy or eccentric to those around him, but behind his polished exterior is a mind that misses nothing. He notices the tiniest details—an out-of-place button, an oddly timed glance, a contradiction in someone's story—and pieces them together with uncanny precision.

Poirot first appeared in *THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES* (1920) and quickly became a favorite with readers around the world. Christie herself once referred to him as “insufferable,” but she kept writing him because of his immense popularity. In *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*, Poirot is at the height of his powers, faced with one of his most morally complex and emotionally charged cases. In solving it, he must face a question that is much less straightforward than “whodunnit”: What is the true meaning of justice?

Pictured above: Max Lardent as Hercule Poirot in NCT's 2025 production of *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*.

Photo by Shahab Zargari.

# MEET YOUR SUSPECTS

## THE PASSENGERS OF THE ORIENT EXPRESS



### CONSTANTINE BOUC

Bouc is the charming (and slightly frantic) director of the Wagon Lit train company—and a close friend of Hercule Poirot. Though not a detective himself, Bouc is Poirot's sounding board. Though deeply shaken by the events unfolding on his train, his loyalty to Poirot and his concern for the train's reputation make him a vital part of the mystery.

### MARY DEBENHAM

Mary is a poised English governess whose calm demeanor masks a sharp intellect and a guarded past. With her measured words and careful presence, Mary becomes one of Poirot's most intriguing suspects. Is she simply a refined young woman in the wrong place at the wrong time, or does her cool exterior conceal a deeper connection to the crime?



### COLONEL ARBUTHNOT

Arbuthnot is a disciplined British officer, of Scottish descent. He shares a connection with Mary Debenham, though neither of them is eager to explain how—or why. Loyal, blunt, and not one to mince words, Arbuthnot is quick to defend Mary and even quicker to bristle when questioned. But could the Colonel be guarding more than just his pride?



Pictured: Nick Case as Bouc; Autumn Morgan as Mary; and Drew Callahan as Colonel Arbuthnot in NCT's 2025 production of MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS. Photos by Shahab Zargari and Kate Critchfield.

# MEET YOUR SUSPECTS

## THE PASSENGERS OF THE ORIENT EXPRESS

### HELEN HUBBARD

Loud, lively, and impossible to ignore, Mrs. Hubbard is an American matron with a flair for the dramatic and a suitcase full of opinions. She claims to know everything and everyone—and insists something sinister is happening on the train. Beneath the over-the-top chatter, though, is a woman far more complex than she lets on.



### COUNTESS ELENA ANDRENYI

Elegant, refined, and almost too perfect, the Countess Andrenyi exudes sophistication and secrecy. From Hungary, the Countess is a skilled medical practitioner. She is soft-spoken and delicate, but Poirot suspects there is more to her than high cheekbones and a noble name. In this case, charm can be a mask—and masks can hide anything.

### HECTOR MACQUEEN

An American who works as a secretary for the murder victim, Hector MacQueen is talkative and anxious. Though outwardly helpful and cooperative, MacQueen clearly has something on his mind—and Poirot is determined to find out what it is. Could a man so openly suspicious actually be hiding in plain sight?



Pictured: Kate Critchfield as Mrs. Hubbard; JoAnn Birt as Countess Andrenyi; and Andrew Trevino as MacQueen in NCT's 2025 production of MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS.  
Photos by Shahab Zargari.

# MEET YOUR SUSPECTS

## THE PASSENGERS OF THE ORIENT EXPRESS



### PRINCESS NATALYA DRAGOMIROFF

A formidable Russian aristocrat with an iron will and an air of royalty, Princess Dragomiroff is not easily rattled. Sharp-tongued and fiercely loyal to those she considers family, she is a relic of a more elegant—yet unforgiving—era. She may claim to not be involved in the crime, but Poirot knows better than to underestimate her.

### GRETA OHLSSON

A deeply religious Swedish missionary, Greta is emotional, sincere, and seemingly incapable of deceit. She's nervous under pressure and quick to tears—but is her fluttering nature just a cover? Her compassion is genuine, but compassion and guilt may not be so easily separated.



### MICHEL THE CONDUCTOR

As the train's conductor, Michel, from France, is responsible for keeping order aboard the Orient Express, but even he can't prevent a murder. He does his job with care, but when the investigation begins, Poirot finds reason to wonder whether Michel knows more than he admits ... or whether he's just another cog in a much bigger machine.

Pictured: Kym Mellen as Princess Dragomiroff; Alex Rector as Greta; and Dylan Omori McCombs as Michel in NCT's 2025 production of MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS.  
Photos by Shahab Zargari and Kate Critchfield.

# PRODUCTION HISTORY

Ken Ludwig's stage adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express* was commissioned by the Agatha Christie Estate, and premiered in 2017 at the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, New Jersey. Directed by Emily Mann, the production featured a glamorous Art Deco set and lush costumes, all brought to life with Ludwig's signature wit and flair for theatrical storytelling. The play was developed with the intention of making Christie's classic mystery more accessible to modern audiences while preserving its period charm and clever intricacy.

Following its successful premiere, the play quickly gained popularity in regional theatres across the United States and beyond. After the premiere at the McCarter Theatre Center, the production carried over much of the original creative team and staging to the Hartford Center, in Hartford, Connecticut, in 2018. After the pandemic, the script saw a huge resurgence on regional, community, and educational stages.



## FUN FACT

THIS SHOW, IN ALL ITS ADAPTATIONS, FEATURES SOME OF THE MOST DIVERSE ACCENT WORK SEEN ON THE STAGE! THE SCRIPT CALLS FOR A VARIETY OF DISTINCTIVE ACCENTS - AMERICAN, RUSSIAN, BELGIAN, SWEDISH, SCOTTISH, AND HUNGARIAN, TO NAME A FEW!

Pictured above: Max Lardent as Poirot and Andrew Bullard as Samuel Ratchett in NCT's 2025 production of *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS*.  
Photo by Shahab Zargari.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## WRITE YOUR OWN MURDER MYSTERY

### 👤 Step 1: Pick Your Setting

Where does the mystery take place?  
The setting will shape the tone of the whole story.

- A glamorous 1920s party?
- A spooky mansion?
- A small-town diner?
- A high school during prom night?

👉 TIP: Choose a setting you find exciting or funny—you'll be spending a lot of time there!



### 🔪 Step 3: Plan the Crime

Ask yourself:

- How was the victim killed? (poison, weapon, fall, etc.)
- When and where did it happen?
- Who had the means, motive, and opportunity?

Write out the full crime—even if the audience won't know right away.

👉 TIP: Make a timeline of the crime to keep track of clues and alibis.

### 👥 Step 2: Create Your Cast of Characters

You'll need:

- The Victim - who dies (and why were they a target?)
- The Sleuth - the detective (professional or amateur!)
- The Suspects - at least 3-5 people with motives

Each suspect should have:

- A motive (why they might have done it)
- A personality (over-the-top, secretive, hilarious, etc.)
- A secret (that may or may not be related to the crime)

👉 TIP: Give everyone a reason to seem guilty—it keeps the mystery juicy!

### 🌿 Step 4: Plant the Clues (and Red Herrings!)

Scatter clues throughout the story. Then, throw in some red herrings (fake clues) to mislead the audience.

Examples:

- A glove left behind
- A suspicious phone call
- A character caught in a lie

👉 TIP: Readers or viewers should be able to solve the mystery by the end if they've been paying attention.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## WRITE YOUR OWN MURDER MYSTERY

### Step 5: Structure the Mystery

Use this basic format:

1. Opening scene - introduces characters, setting, and hints of conflict
2. The murder happens
3. The investigation - interviews, secrets revealed, clues found
4. The twist - something unexpected that changes everything
5. The reveal - the sleuth explains who did it and how!

**TIP:** Build suspense! Let tension grow scene by scene.

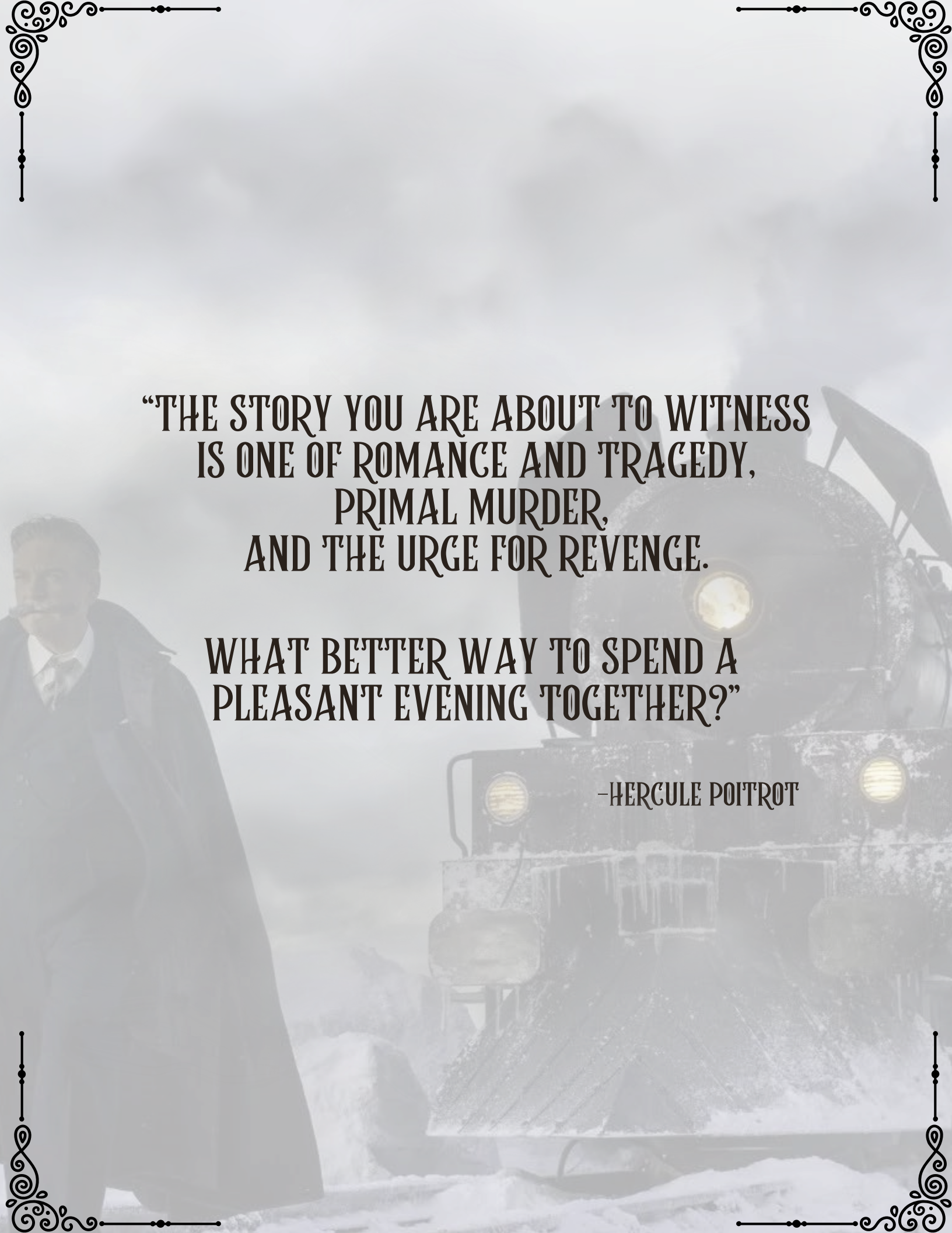
### Quick Prompts to Spark Ideas:

- “Everyone hated the drama teacher. But only one person killed them...”
- “A snowstorm traps six students in school overnight. One doesn’t make it to morning.”
- “Someone swapped the prom punch with poison. But who?”

### Final Touches

- Add humor, drama, or suspense depending on your vibe.
- Keep your audience guessing—but make sure your ending makes sense.
- Give your detective a memorable final line!





**“THE STORY YOU ARE ABOUT TO WITNESS  
IS ONE OF ROMANCE AND TRAGEDY,  
PRIMAL MURDER,  
AND THE URGE FOR REVENGE.**

**WHAT BETTER WAY TO SPEND A  
PLEASANT EVENING TOGETHER?”**

**-HERCULE POITROT**