

## Discussion Questions

- 1 “It is difficult to know quite where to begin this story,” states the Vicar in Agatha Christie’s *The Murder at the Vicarage*, “but I have fixed my choice on a certain Wednesday at luncheon at the Vicarage.” How is this different from the opening in the film? What plot line do the filmmakers choose to focus on? Why do you think they made those choices? To what extent do the different openings affect your sense of the story? How might you open the film?
- 2 Miss Jane Marple lives as an elderly spinster in 1930’s St. Mary Mead and solves crimes by observation and intuition. Compare her to female detectives in current murder mystery novels, plays, or television shows. How are they alike or different? Why do you think Miss Marple has been so perennially popular? What, if anything, does she symbolize?
- 3 St. Mary Mead is “a stagnant pool” according to Miss Marple’s nephew. “Nothing,” retorts Miss Marple, “is so full of life under the microscope as a drop of water from a stagnant pool.” Brainstorm a list of mystery novels, films, short stories, and television shows set in small towns. What is it about small towns that makes them such rich locations for mysteries? How do you think Agatha Christie felt about the place, importance, and comedy of small town life?
- 4 When Inspector Slack questions Colonel Protheroe’s chauffeur, Reeves, the Vicar muses, “Were there things [Reeves] knew and could have told us? There is nothing so inhuman as the mask of the good servant.” Take the point of view of the book’s servants: What might Reeves think of Colonel and Mrs. Protheroe? How might Mary see the Vicar? Or his young wife? How would the addition of the servants’ thoughts and feelings alter your reading of the book?
- 5 Lawrence Redding is jokingly called “that favourite character of fiction, the amateur detective.” In many mysteries the reader is, in fact, an amateur detective—second-guessing not just the characters, but also the writer. What plot twists or scenes made you suspect certain characters in Colonel Protheroe’s murder? Why? Was there a point when you were sure you knew who committed the crime? How does Agatha Christie help make her readers into amateur detectives?
- 6 One of the pleasures of reading is imagining how the characters look and behave. Before watching the film, how did you imagine Miss Marple, Lawrence Redding Lettice, and Anne Protheroe? Consider how you pictured their hair color, dress, and manners. Then compare this to how the characters are portrayed in the film. What is gained or

lost in the way the film interprets the characters? Which do you prefer, the way you *imagined* the characters or the characters on screen? Why?

- 7 In the film, Miss Marple has a married lover and talks about sex; entirely new scenes are invented and a new ending scene is added. How do you feel about these changes? How might Agatha Christie respond to these changes? Are there limits to how much something can or should be changed? What does it mean to be “faithful” to a work of literature—to capture it literally or to capture its spirit? You may want to create a list of other film adaptations and rate whether you prefer the book or film.

*The Murder at the Vicarage*, by Agatha Christie, was first published in 1960. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *The Murder at the Vicarage* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/mystery/vicarage/>.

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