

Poem "ten little indians" essay sample

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Poem “ Ten Little Indians” Essay Sample

1. Discuss the role of the poem “ Ten Little Indians” in *And Then There Were None*. Why does the murderer choose to follow the poem so closely? What effect does this have on the characters? A: The “ Ten Little Indians” rhyme guides the progression of the novel. The singsong, childish verses tell the story of the deaths of ten Indian boys and end with the line that gives the novel its title: “ and then there were none.” A framed copy of the rhyme hangs in every bedroom, and ten small Indian figures sit on the dining-room table. The murders are carried out to match, as closely as possible, the lines in the poem, and after each murder, one of the figures vanishes from the dining room. The overall effect is one of almost supernatural inevitability; eventually, all the characters realize that the next murder will match the next verse, yet they are unable to escape their fates. The poem affects Vera Claythorne more powerfully than it affects anyone else. She becomes obsessed with it, and when she eventually kills herself she is operating under the suggestive power of the poem’s final verse.

2. Discuss how Christie portrays social hierarchies. What commentary is she making on her society’s class system? A: *And Then There Were None* takes place in 1930s Britain, a society stratified into strict social classes. These distinctions play a subtle but important role in the novel. As the situation on the island becomes more and more desperate, social hierarchies continue to dictate behavior, and their persistence ultimately makes it harder for some characters to survive. Rogers continues to perform his butler’s duties even after it becomes clear that a murderer is on the loose, and even after the

murderer has killed his wife. Because it is expected of a man of his social class, Rogers washes up after people, remains downstairs to clean up after the others have gone to bed, and rises early in the morning to chop firewood. The separation from the group that his work necessitates makes it easy for the murderer to kill him. Additionally, the class-bound mentality of Dr. Armstrong proves disastrous for himself and others, as he refuses to believe that a respectable professional man like Wargrave could be the killer.

3. Do you think that Wargrave acts justly? Why or why not?

A: Most murder mysteries examine justice—its violation, through the act of murder, and its restoration, through the work of a detective who solves the crime and ensures that the murderer pays for his or her deed. And *Then There Were None* examines justice, but it bends the formula by making the victims of murder people who committed murder themselves. Thus, the killings on Indian Island are arguably acts of justice. Judge Wargrave does the work of detective and murderer by picking out those who are guilty and punishing them. Whether we accept the justice of the events on Indian Island depends on both whether we accept Wargrave's belief that all the murder victims deserve their deaths and whether we accept that Wargrave has the moral authority to pronounce and carry out the sentences. At least some of the murders are unjust if we do not consider all of Wargrave's victims murderers.

Emily Brent, for example, did not actually kill her servant, Beatrice Taylor. Thus, one could argue that she deserves a lesser punishment for her sin. Christie explores the line that divides those who act unjustly from those who

seek to restore justice. She suggests that unjust behavior does not necessarily make someone bad and enforcing justice does not necessarily make someone good. Wargrave's victims, although they have violated the rules of moral behavior in the past, are, for the most part, far more likable and decent human beings than Wargrave. Although Wargrave serves justice in a technical sense, he is a cruel and unsympathetic man, and likely insane.

4. Discuss the various alliances that form throughout the novel—particularly those between Blore, Armstrong, and Lombard; between Armstrong and Wargrave; and between Vera and Lombard. How do these alliances affect events? What makes them break down? A: The alliances were:

Armstrong/Wargrave

Lombard/Claythorne

The Armstrong /Wargrave alliance was partially dictated by the fact that they saw each other as "men of reason", one being a doctor and the other a retired judge. They were educated, professional men who were connected with positions of power in normal society, so it stood to reason that the two of them would gravitate toward one another. Of course, Wargrave's OTHER intention was much more sinister, in the sense that he was using Armstrong to help him enact his diabolical plans. As far as Claythorne and Lombard are concerned, they are, arguably, the "protagonists" in the story. There is some romantic attraction between the two of them, so that initiates the alliance. The alliance is strengthened by the fact that they begin to trust each other; Christie definitely portrays these two as the most likeable (and

arguably, the most "innocent") of the ten characters, so it fits in with the natural arc of the story to have them align together.

5. Discuss the order in which the characters die. Why do some live longer than others? Do you think this is this entirely by design? Does the murderer ever seem to lose control of the situation? A: If you consider this question from a moral standpoint, then it IS in the right category. Think of the biblical commandments: "You shall not murder." (Exodus 20: 13 NIV) and "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev. 19: 18 NIV). All of the characters in the book *And Then There Were None* were guilty of these sins to different degrees. In the version I read, the Judge (who was always in control of the situation) determined the order in which the guests would die by their degree of guilt; he believed the first people to die were not as guilty as the last people to die.

1. Anthony Marston poisoned in drawing room.
2. Mrs. Rogers poisoned in bedroom.
3. General Macarthur hit on back of head.
4. Mr. Rogers chopped in back of head near woodshed.
5. Emily Brent poisoned while sitting in dining room.
6. Justice Wargrave fakes his death (gunshot to head) with help of Dr. Armstrong.
7. Dr. Armstrong pushed over cliff.
8. Mr. Blore hit with marble block.
9. Philip Lombard shot with his own gun.
10. Vera hangs herself in bedroom.

Key Facts

full title · And Then There Were None (originally published as Ten Little Indians) author · Agatha Christie

type of work · Novel

genre · Murder mystery

language · English

time and place written · 1939, England

date of first publication · 1939

publisher · G. P. Putnam's Sons

narrator · The narrator is an unnamed omniscient individual. point of view · The point of view constantly shifts back and forth between each of the ten characters. tone · The narrator relates the story in a dark, foreboding, and sinister tone, and often reacts dramatically (or melodramatically) to the events of the story. tense · Past

setting (time) · 1930s

setting (place) · Indian Island, a fictional island off the English coast

protagonist · Although no clear protagonist exists, Vera Claythorne and Philip Lombard are the most fully developed characters, and they outlive almost everyone else. major conflict · An anonymous killer gathers a collection of strangers on Indian Island to murder them as punishment for their past crimes. rising action · The accusations made by the recorded voice turn the island getaway into a scene of paranoia; the murders of Tony Marston, Mrs. Rogers, General Macarthur, Mr. Rogers, and Emily Brent indicate that no one will be able to escape the "Ten Little Indians" rhyme. climax · The apparent death of Judge Wargrave and the disappearance of Dr. Armstrong strip away

any sense of order. falling action · The murders of Blore, Lombard, and Vera, combined with Wargrave's confession, restore some sense of order to the chaos of the story. themes · The administration of justice; the effects of guilt on one's conscience; the danger of reliance on class distinctions motifs · The " Ten Little Indians" poem; dreams and hallucinations symbols · The storm; the mark on Judge Wargrave's forehead; food foreshadowing · Vera's first sight of Indian Island, which she thinks looks sinister, hints at the trouble to come; the old man's warning to Blore on the train that the day of judgment is approaching hints that Blore will soon die; the " Ten Little Indians" poem lays out the pattern for the imminent murders; Vera's fascination with both the poem and the hook on her ceiling presage her eventual decision to hang herself.