

JourneyForth Study Guide

This study guide is designed to help you think analytically about the content of the book. The questions that follow are open-ended, allowing you to discuss various topics and issues addressed in the novel. They cover four broad categories: character, plot, setting, and theme.

The Red House Mystery

by A.A. Milne

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Inductive and deductive reasoning

Systems of reasoning help people organize their ideas and reach dependable conclusions. Two of the best known systems are inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning.

Inductive reasoning often uses generalization, analogy, or statistical inference to reach a conclusion. An individual using generalization observes many specific instances of an occurrence before drawing a general conclusion about them. Someone using analogy reaches a conclusion by comparing ideas or occurrences to see how they are alike. If the observer uses statistical inference, he draws a conclusion about a whole group from observing only a part of it.

When using deductive reasoning, the observer begins with a general statement and works toward the specific reasons that support the statement. This method uses syllogisms usually made up of two statements called the major premise and the minor premise. From these two statements a conclusion can be drawn.

There are two ways to form a valid syllogism. The first method *affirms* the major premise. For example:

Major premise: All computer scientists are smart.
Minor premise: Kristen is a computer scientist.
Conclusion: Kristen is smart.

The major premise is a general statement about all computer scientists. The minor premise refers to a specific computer scientist, Kristen, and *affirms* that she is part of the group in the major premise. If that is so, then the conclusion, that she is smart because all computer scientists are smart, must be true.

A valid syllogism can also be formed when the minor premise *negates* or does not support the major premise. For example:

Major premise: All computer scientists are nerdy.
Minor premise: Kevin is not nerdy.
Conclusion: Kevin is not a computer scientist.

Once again the major premise makes a statement about all computer scientists and the minor premise refers to an individual. In this syllogism the minor premise “Kevin is not” *negates* or denies the second half of the major premise. The conclusion is that Kevin can’t be a computer scientist because he doesn’t fit the description of “nerdy.”

One of the greatest detectives in literature, Sherlock Holmes, often used deductive reasoning to solve his cases.

Concerning character

1. There are key players in the murder—Mark, Cayley, Robert, and Miss Angela Norbury. Give a brief description of each character—his personality, his physical characteristics, and/or his character traits.
2. Mr. Gillingham is notorious for switching jobs frequently: newspaper reporter, valet, tobacconist's shop assistant, waiter. Now he attempts to be a detective like Sherlock Holmes. Read pages 15, 44, and 67. What characteristics make Antony perfect for the job of “sleuth hound”?
3. Read pages 117 and 137. In solving the crime, what did Antony fear most about discovering the truth?
4. *The Red House Mystery* characters all have different perspectives of the murder. How does each of the following feel about it?
 - a. Bill (pp. 66, 137)
 - b. Antony (p. 100)
 - c. Inspector Birch (pp. 102, 176)
5. Several characters are suspects in the case of Robert/Mark's murder—Antony, Cayley, Mark (in the case of his “brother”), and Angela. Explain the motives each might have for killing Robert/Mark. What might each have to gain?

Concerning plot

6. In a literary work, the plot is the series of incidents in the story. The plot of *The Red House Mystery* follows many twists and turns as we discover clues and new information with Antony and Bill. In many places it seems that “it's the unexpected that's the most likely in this sort of case” (p. 103). The main “sleuths”—Inspector Birch, Antony, and Bill—all have suspicions about who murdered Robert and what really happened. For these three, give a brief description including plot points of how each believes the murder took place.
7. Earlier you read a section on deductive reasoning. Antony often uses deductive reasoning when putting clues together. How does Antony start with general facts that lead to the discovery of the secret passage (pp. 70-71)?
8. What clues does Milne drop that lead Antony to believe Cayley is the killer and that Mark and Robert are the same person (pp. 198-200)?

9. Twists of plot often leave us wondering who the real murderer is. What characters did you suspect along the way, and how did you deduce or induce each might be guilty? For example:

Milne leads us to believe that Angela might have murdered Mark. At the Plough and Horses, Bill discovers a woman has lodged there overnight. Antony reacts with surprise and suspicion, and we induce that Antony suspects a woman could have committed the crime after all.

10. A climax is the moment of highest tension or emotion in a story. After having read the book, what do you think is the climax of *The Red House Mystery*? Was it the inquest, Cayley's letter, or some other point in the story?

Concerning setting and historical context

11. A story's setting is the where and why of the story. One of the most important details of a setting is its atmosphere—the tone or mood. The morning of the murder, Cayley's response to Betty's daring comment is "meant as a hint to any too curious guest not to ask more questions, or a reminder to his host not to talk too freely in front of strangers" (p. 14). Audrey hears "bangs and explosions and terrible things" that sound as if "one of the men [were] shooting rabbits" (p. 7). As Antony approaches the house to visit his friend Bill, "there was a lazy murmur of bees in the flower borders, a gentle cooing of pigeons in the tops of the elms, and from distant lawns the whir of a mowing machine, that most restful of country sounds. . . . And in the hall a man was banging at a locked door and shouting" (p. 17). After reading these segments from the book, how would you describe the atmosphere of the Red House the day Robert is murdered?
12. In *The Red House Mystery*, Antony is portrayed as a type of Sherlock Holmes with Bill as his Watson. Sherlock Holmes, you will recall from the beginning section of this study guide, primarily uses deductive reasoning to solve his mysteries. In this one, Antony uses both. Give an example of Antony's deductive reasoning in solving the crime. For example:

In chapter twenty-two, Antony deduces from the general—a dentist checks a dead man's teeth to confirm it is, indeed, his patient—to a specific instance—Mark's dentist can check his teeth to identify the dead man as Mark.

13. Antony also uses inductive reasoning—drawing a general conclusion from specific instances. For instance, because Antony has never met Mark, Antony has to induce much about him. He has to observe Mark's specific actions and conclude general personality traits about him, some of which are very important to the case. Give an example of Antony's use of inductive reasoning. For example:

Mark always keeps Cayley busy as his personal secretary, "his land agent, his financial adviser, his courier" (p. 187). From this instance, Antony can conclude that Mark generally relied heavily on Cayley for everything—Mark "was quite lost and helpless without him" (p. 59).

14. What two conclusions does Antony draw (p. 196) from the clues he gathered?
15. Several issues of early twentieth century England that are addressed in *The Red House Mystery* remain prevalent today. Two are listed below. For each one, provide examples found in the book and discuss how each issue is relevant today.
 - a. The “normal” man’s incapability to commit murder
 - b. The justification of murder—premeditated or not—under certain circumstances

Concerning tone and theme

16. A theme is an idea, concept, or message that is reinforced through the overall work. After studying pages 58, 186, and 195, what do you think is the main theme of the book?
17. When Antony asks Bill about the likelihood of Mark’s murdering his own brother, he replies, “He wouldn’t murder anybody. . . . [H]e’s not big enough for it. He’s got his faults, like all of us, but they aren’t on that scale” (p. 58). Is every man capable of murder? Why or why not?
18. “Cayley’s qualities,” Bill thinks, “may have been chiefly negative; but even if this merit lay in the fact that [Cayley] never exposed whatever weaknesses he may have had, this is an excellent quality in a [host]. . . . Mark’s weaknesses on the other hand were very plain to the eye” (p. 105). Do you agree with Bill? Is it better for someone to hide his vices or to have them exposed—especially where a murder is concerned?
19. In his letter to Antony, Cayley writes that Mark’s death was necessary (p. 186). Is it ever necessary to premeditatedly kill another human being? Support your answer with Scripture.
20. For what reasons did Cayley kill Mark? Are they really good enough to make the murder justifiable?