

## Parents' Reading Group

The latest meeting was held in the library on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> May and we discussed two crime novels with a view to considering if they could be recommended to the KS3 age group: Agatha Christie: *Peril at End House* and Lindsey Davis: *A Dying Light in Corduba*.

Lindsey Davis has written a series of novels centred on the investigations of one Marcus Didius Falco and has become something of a cult author for some readers. This one opens with a banquet and the subsequent murder and attempted murder of two of the guests, but Falco is on to the case straight away. His investigations take him to the Roman province of Baetica in southern Spain where he uncovers, with some difficulty for there is a considerable amount of *omertà*, webs of corruption engulfing the olive oil industry. It all leads back to the emperor himself, Vespasian. Just as in Italy today...Plus ça change! The love interest is provided by his girlfriend – a very Roman, modern relationship, this – who is eight months pregnant and insists on going with him. The descriptions of the settings are very detailed and evocative.

The TLS found this book “highly readable, funny and colourful” and The Times thought it “all so enjoyable”. It was appreciated by at least one of us for presenting female characters in a strong light and for being funny. Some of us considered that the language and intricacy of the plot and the number of characters might put off younger readers. Although it was a good story, it was felt that these and the writing style got in the way of it, and it is the story that younger readers want to be able to follow. Our immediate reaction was that this is definitely a book for older readers but that some Year 9s might enjoy it, especially if they were interested in Roman history and had enjoyed the Caroline Lawrence ‘Roman Mystery’ books earlier on. We would not, however, recommend the book to younger readers.

We all enjoyed the Agatha Christie which was a good story and easier to follow than the Davis. It was first published in 1931 and the atmosphere of the period is very vivid. Poirot has retired and is on holiday on the Cornish Riviera with Hastings, but inevitably finds himself caught up in an attempted murder and then a real one. The action takes place in a run-down but still inhabited large house at the end of an isolated path, the inheritance of a young girl, Nick (a nickname – names turn out to be significant), who is secretly engaged to an intrepid adventurer whose round the world flight in an aeroplane is cut short when his plane comes down in the Pacific Ocean – a theme absolutely of its moment; how modern it must have seemed! But who is the mysterious Frederica Rice? Who are the new Australian lodgers who mostly keep themselves to themselves? Why is an apparently innocent outsider murdered during the fireworks party? What is the role of the housekeeper? And how clever of Agatha Christie to find a way of bringing Inspector Japp all the way to Cornwall and into the story!

We enjoyed the plot and at least one of us commented how well the assassin's identity was hidden by the intrigue. The book was also enjoyed by a daughter who had seen the TV series, but reservations were expressed about the casual references to the use of drugs – at a time, of course, when such use was not illegal - and recommending it to girls younger than Year 9. We agreed that this would be a good light read for a holiday period.

We have agreed to meet next on **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> June**, still at **6.15** in the library, and have chosen two books set in medieval England: Philip Reeve: *Here Lies Arthur* published in paperback by Scholastic at £6.99 and shortlisted for this year's Carnegie Prize; and Cynthis Harnett: *The Wool-pack*, published in a Mammoth imprint at £4.99, and a previous Carnegie winner.