

Penguin Readers Factsheets

Teacher's Notes

Three Short Stories of Sherlock Holmes

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Summary

This book contains three short detective stories about Sherlock Holmes. At the beginning of each story, someone approaches Holmes with a problem. Holmes asks various questions, gathers and examines clues, and finally arrives at a solution.

In the first story, Miss Mary Sutherland comes to Holmes's Baker Street home with a problem about her fiancé, Mr Hosmer Angel. On the day of their wedding Mr Angel disappeared at the church and has not been seen or heard from since.

Holmes discovers that Hosmer Angel is really Mary's stepfather, Mr Windibank, in disguise. As Hosmer Angel, he pretended to fall in love with Mary so that he could keep Mary's money while she lived with her mother and stepfather. Mr Windibank admits his crime but Holmes decides not to tell Mary because she still loves Hosmer Angel so much.

In the second story, a university professor, Hilton Soames, asks for Holmes's help because someone goes into his room and looks at some important exam papers. He finds several clues in his room: a cut on his desk, a broken pencil and some black clay. There are three suspects – the students who live above Mr Soames's rooms.

Holmes soon knows which student is to blame. He also discovers that someone else has been keeping a secret from Mr Soames: his butler, Bannister. Finally, the student admits that he saw the papers, and explains that he does not want to take the exam after all, as he has a job in South Africa.

In the final story, a beautiful young woman, Miss Violet Smith, comes to Holmes because a man is following her on a bicycle. Although Miss Smith is engaged, another man, Mr Woodley, wants to marry her. First Dr Watson, then Holmes, go to Farnham, where Miss Smith works and lives.

In the dramatic conclusion to the story, Miss Smith is kidnapped and forced to marry Mr Woodley, the man on the bicycle reveals his true identity and shoots Mr Woodley, and Holmes and Watson arrive just in time to save Miss Smith.

About Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh, in Scotland, in 1859. He studied medicine at Edinburgh University and began work as a doctor in England in 1885. But his doctor's practice was not busy and Doyle used his spare time to write his first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, (1887). Holmes and Watson also featured in his next novel, *The Sign of Four*, (1890). But Holmes did not

capture the public's imagination until 1891 when Sherlock Holmes short stories were published in instalments in the *Strand Magazine*.

Sherlock Holmes was soon very popular. Doyle even found that his Holmes stories were stopping him from writing about other things, so he decided to end the series by killing Sherlock Holmes in *The Final Problem*, (1893). However, when he returned from the Boer War in 1902, Doyle decided to bring Sherlock Holmes back to life. By the 1920s he was one of the most famous and well paid writers in the world. He wrote sixty stories about Holmes and Watson between 1887 and 1927.

Doyle also wrote other novels and non-fiction books. After his books about the Boer War, the British Government decided to award him a knighthood, and he became Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He continued writing Sherlock Holmes stories until 1927. He died of heart disease in 1930.

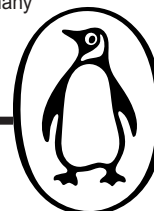
Today Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson remain famous and popular all around the world. The Sherlock Holmes Museum in Baker Street, London, is one of the city's most popular attractions with visitors from many different countries. Now and into the future, people everywhere will continue to enjoy Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's clever stories of mystery, suspense and imagination.

Background and themes

Most of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories are set in London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Just the name of Sherlock Holmes conjures up a mysterious background of gaslit streets and horse-drawn cabs disappearing into the London mists. But Holmes often travelled to different parts of England, and in these stories we see Holmes in action in a University town (probably Oxford or Cambridge) and in the Surrey countryside, as well as in London.

Money and greed is an important theme in two of these stories. Typically, Doyle wrote about the professional classes (doctors, lawyers, teachers) with whom he was most familiar. This class of people were well educated and hard working. They are usually the trustworthy and honest characters in Doyle's stories. He also wrote about a new class of people – wealthy businessmen. Some of these people were new to money and wanted to live the easy lives of the upper classes. Both Miss Sutherland (from the first story) and Miss Smith (from the third story) are tricked into or out of marriage by unscrupulous businessmen who are eager to take the women's money.

Disguise and mistaken identity are important themes in many detective stories, and Doyle led the way for many



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mystery and detective story writers who followed him. One of Sherlock Holmes's most famous characteristics is his ability to notice minor details of a person's appearance and to deduce that person's character and lifestyle from these details. Sherlock Holmes immediately notices the red marks on Miss Sutherland's nose and arms (and deduces she is a short-sighted typist). And, in the same story, Holmes is easily able to look behind the most obvious details of appearance (dark glasses and a beard) to recognize the true identity of the man beneath.

Each of these stories has a similar structure: Sherlock Holmes is approached by a stranger with a problem. Holmes carefully and quickly analyses the stranger's character, asks questions about their problems, and gathers a set of clues. Whilst the reader (and Dr Watson) are led in one direction, the story develops in an unpredictable way and ends with a surprising conclusion. This 'twist in the tale' keeps the readers guessing until the last moment and maintains suspense and interest. This structure is typical of Sherlock Holmes stories and has been used by thriller and detective story writers (such as Agatha Christie and John Grisham) ever since.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises, see the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class Readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Ask students to tell you what they know about the time in which Sherlock Holmes stories are set (end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries). Then put the class into groups and give each group a piece of paper. Students should draw a line down the centre of the paper to make two columns. Label the first column '1900' and the second column 'today'. Give the class ten minutes to write as many differences between these two times as they can think of. Finally, ask the groups to present their lists to the rest of the class.
- 2 Put students into pairs. Then, each pair chooses a picture from the book and looks at it carefully for three minutes. After three minutes, student A takes the book and asks student B questions about the picture. Student B should answer as many questions as possible without looking at the book.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Sherlock Holmes and the Strange Mr Angel

- 1 Students write a letter from Mary Sutherland's mother to Mary. She wants to tell her daughter the truth about Mr Windibank and Hosmer Angel. But she doesn't want to hurt her. Students will need to summarize the story as well as think about the relationships between Mary and her parents.
- 2 Students work in groups of three. They should look at the picture on page 5 and imagine a conversation between Miss Sutherland, her mother and the cab driver. Each character should ask and answer questions about Hosmer Angel and the journey to church. Where do they think he has gone?

Sherlock Holmes and the Important Exam Paper

- 1 Students work individually or in pairs. Ask them to rewrite the story from Bannister's point of view. Ask them to start when Soames returns home and calls Bannister to his room (page 14).
- 2 Students work individually. They should write a page in Mr Soames's diary on the night before Holmes solves the problem. Soames knows that one of the students, Gilchrist, Daulat Ras or Miles McLaren has looked at the exam paper. Students should write Soames's thoughts about each suspect. Which one does he think looked at the exam paper, and why?

Sherlock Holmes and the Dangerous Road

- 1 Write these characters' names on the board:

Violet Smith	Ralph Smith	Mr Carruthers	Mr Woodley
Cyril	Mr Williamson	Sherlock Holmes	Dr Watson

Put the class into groups and choose a student from the first group to come up and draw a line between any of the characters who are connected. The student should explain the nature of the relationship (e.g. 'friends', 'stepfather' etc.) Then ask a student from each group in turn to do the same thing until there are no more links.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- 1 Discussion. Why are Sherlock Holmes stories still popular today, one hundred years after they were written? Prompt students to think about the appeal of the main characters as well as what makes a good detective story.
- 2 Sherlock Holmes stories often have a 'twist in the tale', i.e. an unexpected conclusion based on new evidence near the end of the story. Ask students to write a short, simple story of their own. It does not have to be a detective story but it should include a 'twist in the tale.' This exercise can be done in class or as homework.

Word list

It will be useful for your students to know the new words found on the inside back cover of the Reader. They are practised in the 'Before you read' sections at the back of the book. (The definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)



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Student's Activities

Three Short Stories of Sherlock Holmes

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



Level 2 – Elementary Three Short Stories of Sherlock Holmes Photocopiable

These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Read the Introduction on page v and then answer these questions.
 - (a) What is Sherlock Holmes's job?
 - (b) Who is Dr Watson?
 - (c) Why did Sir Arthur Conan Doyle bring Sherlock Holmes back to life again?
 - (d) Where was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle born?
 - (e) How many Sherlock Holmes stories did he write?
- 2 Look at the book's front cover. Which man is Holmes? What is he doing? What is he saying, do you think?

ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

Sherlock Holmes and the Strange Mr Angel

- 1 Who:
 - (a) wears dark glasses?
 - (b) married Mary's mother?
 - (c) dies in New Zealand?
 - (d) takes Mary's one hundred pounds every year?
 - (e) went to the dance with Mary?
 - (f) wrote a letter to Mary every day?
- 2 Complete these sentences. Use these words:
angry before kind quietly secret unhappy
 - (a) Hosmer Angel had a beard and spoke _____.
 - (b) Hosmer Angel was _____ to Mary. She wanted to marry him.
 - (c) Mary's cab arrived at the church _____ Mr Angel's.
 - (d) After Mr Angel disappeared, Mary felt very _____. Her mother was _____.
 - (e) Hosmer Angel's letters to Mary were a _____.
- 3 We hear Mary's story first. But many things are not true. Finish the story before you read these sentences. Then choose true (T) or false (F).
 - (a) When Mary went to the dance, Mr Windibank was in Paris.
 - (b) Mary's money was not important to her mother.
 - (c) Something bad happens to Hosmer Angel.
 - (d) Hosmer Angel lives and works in Leadenhall Street.
 - (e) Mary will always love Hosmer Angel.
- 4 Why are these things important in the story?
 - (a) Mary's Uncle Ned
 - (b) A dance
 - (c) Two cabs

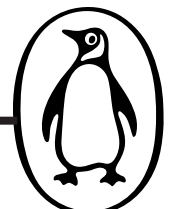
- (d) A typewriter
- (e) Mary's advertisement
- (f) Hosmer Angel's beard and dark glasses
- (g) Mr Windibank's note

Sherlock Holmes and the Important Exam Paper

- 1 Who says these things? What are they talking about?
 - (a) "You're the right person, Mr Holmes. Only you can help."
 - (b) "The third page was on your desk, am I right?"
 - (c) "I felt very bad about it later, sir."
 - (d) "One of them isn't a happy man."
 - (e) "I'm busy. I can't see anybody!"
 - (f) "I found *this* five kilometres away."
 - (g) "I'm a tall man. A shorter man couldn't see them."
 - (h) "When he lost his money, I found work here."
- 2 When did these things happen? Number the sentences from 1–10.
 - (a) Holmes came home through the back door.
 - (b) Soames went to tea at a friend's house and locked his door.
 - (c) Gilchrist went into Soames's room and looked at the exam paper.
 - (d) Soames left his room to look for Sherlock Holmes.
 - (e) Gilchrist hid in Soames's cupboard.
 - (f) Soames found a broken pencil and some black clay in his room.
 - (g) Bannister helped Gilchrist out of Soames's room and locked the door.
 - (h) Soames told Bannister about the exam paper. When he heard the bad news, Bannister felt ill.
 - (i) Bannister sat on Gilchrist's notebook.
 - (j) Gilchrist looked through Soames's window and saw the exam paper.
- 3 You are Gilchrist. You don't want to take your exam. Write a letter to your teacher, Mr Hilton Soames. Why don't you want to take the exam? What will you do now? What do you want to say to your teacher before you go?

Sherlock Holmes and the Dangerous Road

- 1 Answer these questions
 - (a) Who gives work to Violet Smith?
 - (b) At the beginning of the story, why do Mr Carruthers and Mr Woodley want to marry Violet Smith?
 - (c) How do Mr Carruthers's feelings change?
 - (d) Who is the man on the bicycle?
 - (e) Why is Mr Williamson important?
 - (f) Who does Mr Carruthers shoot?



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Student's Activities

- 2 Finish these sentences. Try not to look at the book.
- (a) Mr Carruthers and Mr Woodley came from _____.
 - (b) At the beginning of the story, Violet Smith thinks her uncle Ralph is _____.
 - (c) Violet Smith goes home every _____.
 - (d) Watson learns Mr Williamson's name from a London _____.
 - (e) Sherlock Holmes found a hotel and talked to some people in the _____.
 - (f) Sherlock Holmes and Mr Woodley had a short fight, and Sherlock Holmes _____.
 - (g) Mr Williamson was a vicar but he lost his _____.
 - (h) When Cyril arrives, Violet Smith will feel _____.
- 3 Choose one or more of these words for each person.
- | | | | | | |
|--------|-----------|--------|--------|-----------|-------|
| afraid | beautiful | clever | dead | detective | |
| grey | old | rich | unkind | vicar | young |
- (a) Sherlock Holmes
 - (b) Violet Smith
 - (c) Mr Woodley
 - (e) Mr Williamson
 - (f) Uncle Ralph

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- 1 Who is your favourite character in the book? Who is your least favourite? Write some words and sentences about each character. Why do you like them or not like them?
- 2 Choose one of the pictures in the book. Write about the picture and try to explain the story. Who are the people in the picture? Where are they? What are they doing? Are they good or bad? What happens next?
- 3 What do you think about the two women, Miss Smith and Miss Sutherland? Are they like women today? How are they different?

