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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Six Great Sherlock Holmes Stories

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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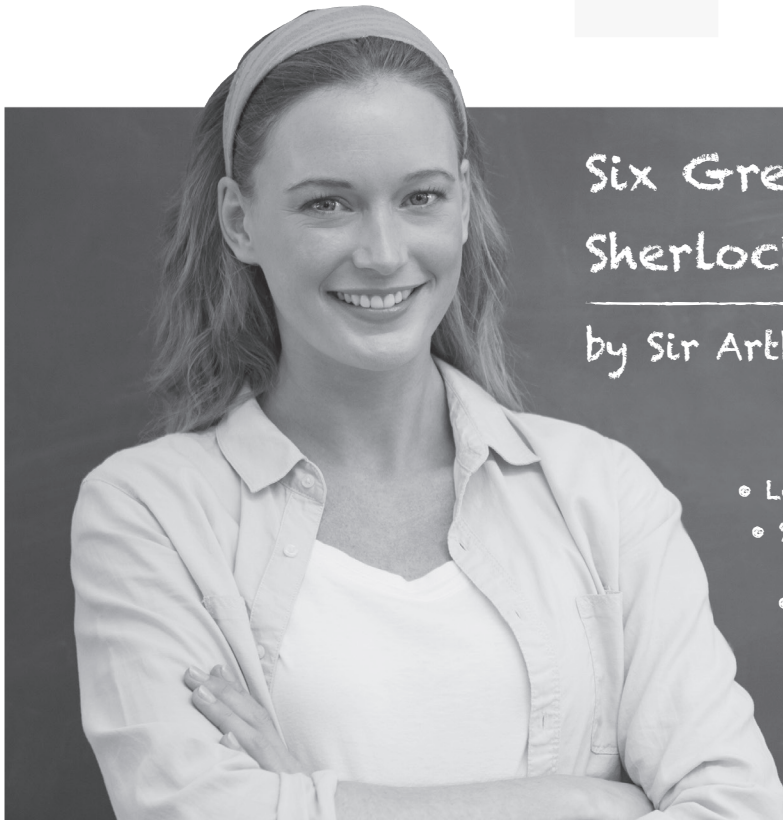
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Six Great Sherlock Holmes Stories

Note to Teacher

This Teaching Unit is designed to be worked through in the order presented. Study questions include linkages from one story to another to emphasize thematic elements, social customs, or literary style.

Teachers wishing to bypass some stories, however, will find that the teaching unit can be easily adapted to this approach by omitting questions that relate to stories that were bypassed. The majority of the study and test questions focus on a single story at a time. To adapt the Unit, teachers should simply scan the study and test questions and cross out any undesired ones before reproducing the pages for students.

All references come from *Six Great Sherlock Holmes Mysteries*, Dover Thrift Editions, Dover Publications Inc., 1992.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. differentiate between the author and the narrator.
2. use textual clues to anticipate action and deductions.
3. discuss the relationship between Holmes and Watson, noting the use of Watson as a foil, as an instrument of public relations, and as an informed observer.
4. evaluate how the practice and status of physicians has changed since the period of the Holmes stories in this edition (1892-1905).
5. cite examples from the stories to discuss social and class changes since the period of the stories.
6. focus on “A Scandal in Bohemia” and “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” to discuss Holmes’ attitude toward women in general.
7. discuss how these early examples of detective fiction have influenced modern detective fiction, TV shows, and/or movies featuring crime and detection.
8. cite conventions that have come to be associated with detective fiction, including the less-than-brilliant assistant, the bumbling detective, the use of “red herrings,” and the use of stereotypes to convey information.
9. locate examples of irony in the text, discuss its links to humor, and its use to strengthen characterization.
10. cite literary references from the text and discuss their appropriateness.
11. use “The Red-Headed League” and “The Adventure of the Engineer’s Thumb” as a springboard for a discussion of gullibility.
12. debate the proposition that Conan Doyle always expected to write more Sherlock Holmes stories after “The Final Problem,” using links between that story and “The Adventure of the Empty House” as the basis of the argument.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Sherlock Holmes displays his skills of observation to astound his client, the King of Bohemia. Ironically, however, he is less observant when it comes to Irene Adler. Discuss instances in which Holmes does not note all the details he should have regarding Miss Adler, and evaluate how this hampers his success in the story.
2. Holmes’ plan for solving the case of the King of Bohemia revolves around his perception of women. Discuss how his perception both helps and limits him.
3. Choose one character from “A Scandal in Bohemia” and state why you think this character is the hero of the story.
4. In “The Red-Headed League,” the criminal John Clay is said to have royal blood, as did the King of Bohemia. Discuss how their perception of themselves as royal affects their behavior and their outlook on life. Comment on whether these characters allow the reader to infer anything about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s attitude toward royalty.
5. In “The Red-Headed League,” Conan Doyle uses two parallel scenes to show off the brilliance of his detective. Consider Holmes’ deductions concerning his client Mr. Wilson in the first of these scenes and his conclusions about the crime as explained at the end of the story. Discuss how the use of these parallel scenes prepares the reader to understand Holmes’ methods, allows the reader to spot clues in the story, and emphasizes Holmes’ abilities at the end.
6. In “The Adventure of the Speckled Band,” Watson refers to two different ethnic groups: Saxons and gypsies. What do you think was the author’s attitude to the two groups? Cite descriptions and references by characters to the groups as the basis for your opinion.
7. There are three animal figures in “The Adventure of the Speckled Band.” Discuss how each of these animals gives depth to the sinister nature of Dr. Roylott.
8. Many people are fearful of snakes. Discuss other methods of murder Dr. Roylott could have used because of the connecting vent and whether the use of a snake makes “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” a particularly scary story.
9. In “The Adventure of the Engineer’s Thumb,” a young man takes a job about which he has serious doubts. Discuss what raised his suspicions about the job, and what motivated him to accept it anyway.

Six Great Sherlock Holmes Stories

Note

VOCABULARY

conversant – acquainted with
omniscient – knowing everything
relevant – pertaining to
resuscitate – to bring back to life; rescue

1. What was Sherlock Holmes' career?

2. Why did the author plan Holmes' death?

3. Why did Conan Doyle return to writing about Holmes?

4. What is unusual about how the author's name is used?

7. The author places several clues in the story; list as many of these as you can.

8. Why has Holmes called on detectives from Scotland Yard when he thinks no crime has been committed?

9. Who is Mr. Merryweather?

10. What is unusual about John Clay's social status?

11. At the end of the story, Watson, in his role as a foil to Holmes, asks questions that allow Holmes to explain his thought process. Why does Conan Doyle write the end of the story this way?

VOCABULARY (CONT.)

repulsion – disgust
rouse – to awaken, stir up
ruse – a trick
shake-down – a makeshift place to stay overnight
socket – a cylinder
station – a class of railway ticket
style – a title
tout – an advisor; one who gives advice

1. How does Watson meet Victor Hatherley? How does Hatherley get to Sherlock Holmes?

2. How does Mr. Hatherley describe Colonel Lysander Stark?

3. What were Mr. Hatherley's main qualifications for the job, according to Colonel Stark?

4. What proposition had Col. Stark made to Mr. Hatherley?

5. According to Colonel Stark, what was this machine used for?
