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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Best of
Sherlock Holmes
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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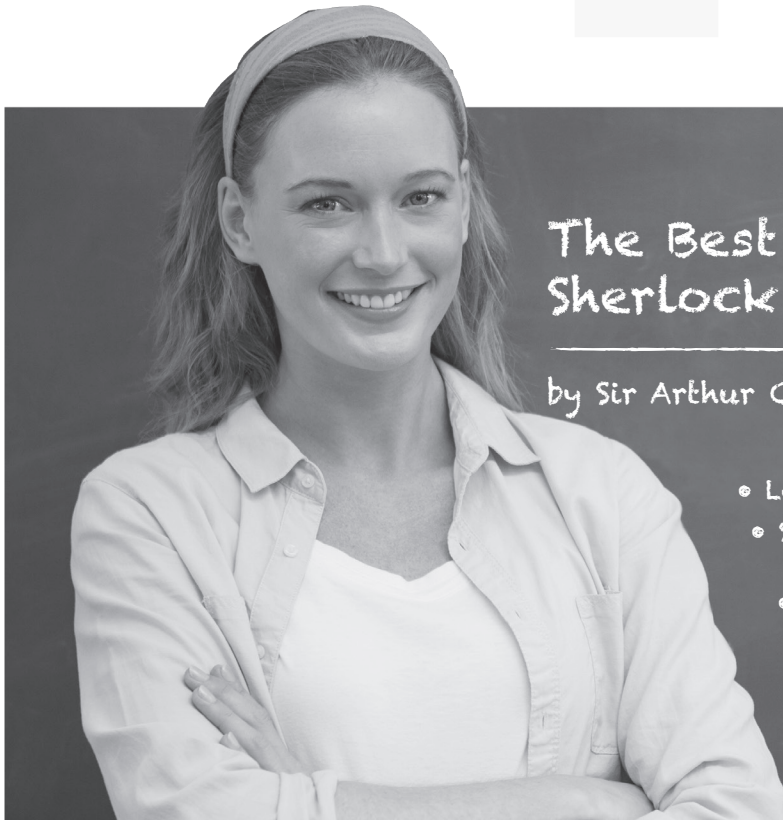
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The Best of Sherlock Holmes

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 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 and discuss its use with humor and strengthening characterization.
10. cite literary references from the text and discuss their appropriateness.
11. use “The Red-Headed League” as a springboard for a discussion of gullibility.
12. define the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
13. discuss Holmes’ evaluation of the ability of the London police force.
14. pull examples from several stories to address universal themes, including the power of greed, the balance of good and evil, and the value of friendship.
15. demonstrate a greater understanding of customs and outlooks in England during Holmes’ fictional life.

The Best of Sherlock Holmes

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, he is less observant when it comes to Irene Adler. Discuss instances in which Holmes does not note all the details that he should have regarding Miss Adler, and evaluate how this hampers his success in the story.
2. Holmes’ plan for solving the case in “A Scandal in Bohemia” revolves around his perception of women. Discuss how his perception both helps and limits him. Compare and contrast Holmes’ viewpoint of Miss Adler and Miss Helen Stoner in “The Adventures of the Speckled Band.”
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 royalty affects their behavior and 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 display 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 Blue Carbuncle,” Holmes makes several references to the judicial system. Based on his comments, describe his attitude toward the police and court systems. Mention at least one other story in which this attitude emerges.
7. Discuss Holmes’ release of James Ryder at the end of “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle.” Is his action surprising, and why or why not?
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. Many people are fearful of snakes. Discuss other methods of murder that Dr. Roylott could have used with the connecting vent, and whether the use of a snake makes “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” a particularly scary story.

1. Who is “*the woman*” and how does Sherlock Holmes view her?

2. How does the narrator describe Holmes?

3. Why has the narrator seen little of Holmes lately?

4. What serious problem does Holmes have?

5. What is the narrator’s background, and how does the reader learn his name?

6. What is the time setting when the story begins?

1. Holmes explains, “For strange effects and extraordinary combinations we must go to life itself, which is always far more daring than any effort of the imagination.” (Pgs. 29 – 30) Why is this comment ironic?

2. Watson studies the client’s clothing in an effort to determine more about him, but decides that the client is a common British businessman or shopkeeper. Holmes, however, astounds Watson by deducing a number of things about the client, Mr. Jabez Wilson. What does Holmes deduce, and how?

3. Mr. Wilson’s assistant, Vincent Spaulding, has two peculiarities. What are they?

4. Mr. Wilson explains that Mr. Spaulding frequently dives “into the cellar like a rabbit into its hole.” (Pg. 32) What figure of speech is used to describe Mr. Spaulding’s habit?

5. How does Mr. Wilson learn about the Red-Headed League?

tallow – animal fat used to make candles
transpired – happened
ulsters – long overcoats made with heavy fabric
vestige – a trace
vitriol-throwing – throwing sulfuric acid
whimsical – humorous; curious
woodcock – a small bird

1. What is odd about the hat in Holmes' apartment?

2. How does Peterson come into possession of the hat and a goose?

3. Why is Peterson unable to return the goose even though the owner's name is on a tag?

4. What does Holmes deduce from the hat, and how?

5. What does Peterson's wife find in the goose, and what does Holmes identify the item to be?

6. According to the newspaper, how was the carbuncle supposedly stolen?

17. What unusual features does Holmes observe when he studies Helen Stoner's room, the same room in which her sister died?

18. What does Holmes find when he inspects Dr. Roylott's room?

19. What is Holmes' plan for the night?

20. What scare do Holmes and Watson encounter on their way back to Stoke Moran in the dark?

21. Describe what Holmes and Watson see and do in the darkness of Miss Stoner's bedroom.

22. What do Holmes and Watson encounter in Dr. Roylott's room?

23. What is the speckled band?
