Community Read 2013

*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

A Reader’s Guide

Table of Contents

A Biography of Arthur Conan Doyle...Pages 2-3

Overview of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*...Pages 4-6

Other Writings by the Author...Pages 7-18

Discussion Questions...Page 19

Related Readings...Page 20

Other Resources of Interest...Page 20
A Biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born May 22, 1859, in Edinburgh, Scotland; died of a heart attack, July 7, 1930, in Crowborough, Sussex, England; son of Charles Altamont (a civil servant and artist) and Mary (Foley) Doyle; married Louise Hawkins, August 6, 1885 (died, 1906); married Jean Leckie, September 18, 1907; children: (first marriage) Mary Louise, Kingsley; (second marriage) Denis, Adrian Malcolm, Lena Jean. Education: Edinburgh University, B.M., 1881, M.D., 1885. Memberships: British Society for Psychical Research.

CAREER:


Wartime service: Served during the Boer War as chief surgeon of a field hospital in Bloemfontein, South Africa, 1900.

AWARDS:

Knighthed, 1902.

The elements in Doyle's life that most influenced his Sherlock Holmes stories were his background as a doctor and his pressing need to earn a living. Born in Scotland in 1859, Doyle entered medical school at the age of seventeen. One of his teachers was Dr. Joseph Bell, whose skill in diagnosing illness had sharpened his powers of observation and reasoning. As a result Bell could, while diagnosing a patient's illness, accurately read clues to his or her background and personality as well. Bell's unusual ability made a lasting impression on Doyle, who modeled some of Holmes' deductive powers on his teacher's example. Doyle served as a ship's surgeon in the early 1880s, traveling to Africa and the Arctic, before returning to England and finishing his degree. At that time, establishing a medical practice was difficult, and Doyle waited in vain for patients to appear.

Fortunately, Doyle had another ambition: to become a writer. Several of his early stories, which featured adventure and mystery aboard ship and in Africa, had appeared in magazines while he was still a medical student. The increasing burden of time on his hands—along with a wife and growing family to support—led Doyle to attempt a novel. Doyle turned to his memories of Dr. Bell and his knowledge that detective stories often brought their writers popular success. Relying on the model set by Edgar Allan Poe's stories of the amateur detective Dupin, whose cases are narrated by an admiring and less clever friend, Doyle introduced Holmes and his sidekick Dr. John Watson in A Study in Scarlet in 1887.
This novel met with only a lukewarm reception from readers, but an American publisher encouraged Doyle to continue the series with *The Sign of Four* in 1890. Even though Doyle continued to write and publish other kinds of stories, especially science fiction and historical fiction, the need for money kept taking him back to the profitable Sherlock Holmes. He was able to give up his unprofitable medical practice in 1891 when short tales of Holmes' exploits began to command larger and larger payments from the British *Strand* magazine, where they were being published. "The Red-Headed League" was collected in the 1892 volume *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, which Doyle dedicated to Dr. Bell.

Doyle eventually tired of composing detective stories, considering them inferior to his other fiction. He wanted to be best known for his writing on more serious subjects. This led him to kill off Holmes in "The Final Problem," a short story published in 1893. However, so many people complained, and the monetary offers for a change of heart were so tempting, that Doyle was persuaded to bring back his detective in 1902 with *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a case set during the period before Holmes's death. The resurrection was completed in the next year, when "The Empty House" revealed that Holmes had actually been in hiding during the time he was thought dead. Sherlock Holmes stories continued to appear until 1927, three years before Doyle's death.

The early twentieth century brought Doyle success in other areas as well. In 1902, he was knighted and given the title "Sir" for his volunteer work as a surgeon in South Africa during the Boer War, along with his writings in support of this war. In the period after World War I, he became an authority on spiritualism, the belief that the dead can communicate with the living. He wrote extensively on this subject and lectured throughout Europe, Africa, Australia, and North America. Doyle's historical fiction, science fiction, and nonfiction books about his life, beliefs, and travels are not often read today, but his Sherlock Holmes stories continue to win fans and inspire imitators throughout the world.


Overview: The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* is the first collection of stories that depict the detective's exploits. In the first adventure, "A Scandal in Bohemia," Holmes and his sidekick, the narrator Dr. Watson, are reunited in their old flat on Baker Street. Watson has recently married and returned to his private medical practice. He is visiting Holmes as a client arrives, and Holmes asks Watson to stay and learn about the case. The client, William, King of Bohemia, is attempting to recover a compromising photo from the actress Irene Adler. The King and the actress had an affair in the past, and she is intent on publishing a scandalous photo of them hoping to undermine his engagement to a princess. By arranging a false fire alert and with the use of disguises, Holmes and Watson are able to retrieve the picture. Holmes trails Adler to a church where she is secretly married. In a comic twist, Holmes is invited to take part in the wedding as a witness.

In the next case, "The Red-Headed League," portly Mr. Wilson asks Holmes to look into the philanthropic organization he joined that was supposedly created by an American millionaire. As an initiation, Wilson had to go to an office each day between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. and perform some menial work; since he usually worked at his pawnshop during the evening, he had time to perform the initiation rite. During his investigation, Holmes discovers that the League is a front for an ongoing bullion heist led by renowned thief John Clay. An assistant to Wilson who first alerted him about the organization was also part of the plot. While Wilson was away from the shop, Clay and his associates were digging a tunnel through which they could access an adjacent bank.

The other cases Holmes and Watson investigate include "A Case of Identity," where Miss Mary Sutherland asks Holmes to look into a disagreement between her stepfather and Mr. Hosmer Angel, her fiancé. Holmes examines correspondences between the two men and discovers that they were all written by the same man, who is attempting to defraud Miss Sutherland of her fortune. In "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" Watson is called on to help solve the death of Mr. McCarthy. McCarthy's son is indicted for the murder, but Holmes discovers that an old man from a rural village has killed McCarthy to prevent the son from marrying the man's daughter against his wishes. The case of "Five Orange Pips" develops as Watson reconstructs his files to recount how Holmes solves the mystery but could not close a case involving orange pips. John Openshaw's uncle received an envelope from India containing orange pips inside and the letters KKK on its flap. Seven weeks later, the uncle apparently committed suicide. Shortly thereafter, Openshaw's father and Openshaw himself died in the same sequence of events. Holmes suspects foul play and traces the murders to an American ship, but can go no further to apprehend the perpetrators. In "The Man with the Twisted Lip," the disappearance of a friend of Watson's is linked to opium. Holmes employs a disguise to uncover the ruse of the missing man, who is leading a double life as a beggar, which earns him an impressive amount of additional income.

"The Blue Carbuncle" begins by introducing Henry Baker's hat as a clue that points not to "some deadly story," as Watson supposes, but simply to "one of those whimsical little incidents which will happen when you have four million human beings all jostling each other within the space of a few square miles" ("BLUE" ["The Blue Carbuncle"], 1:328). The unprovoked attack on Henry Baker by a group of "roughs" is just the kind of anonymous danger that many
feared from city life. By redirecting attention from the attack itself to the "striking and bizarre" problem presented by the hat, Holmes reassures his readers that the detective can distinguish the real dangers of urban existence from its "innocent" (1:328) mental puzzles. By his reading of Henry Baker's moral as well as physical traits from his "battered billycock," he also reassures them that to one armed with a trained eye and an understanding of the laws of human behavior, no individual can remain anonymous for very long or hope to conceal the truth about his moral character. Henry Baker is a more intellectual man than Jabez Wilson and presumably began life in a higher station. At least at one time he exercised the kind of foresight in protecting his property that for the middle class constitutes a sign of virtue: Holmes remarks that Baker's failure to repair his hatsecurer reveals "a moral retrogression" on his part (1:331). He proves to have been an unwitting vehicle in the theft of the carbuncle and is thus in effect absolved of any guilty desire for unearned wealth. Nonetheless, his greater abilities do not prevent him from being a similar object of humor: his pompous manner strikes Watson as merely "comical" (1:337) under the circumstances. His sufferings, like the pawnbroker's, represent simply an intriguing "intellectual problem" (1:329) for Holmes to solve, and he, too, disappears from the story as soon as Holmes's curiosity has been satisfied. If anything, the dismissive treatment of the attack upon him suggests that a man with his gifts has only himself to blame for what happens when he so far disgraces himself as to be found drunkenly roaming the city streets at four o'clock on a Christmas morning.

Watson and Holmes are approached by Helen Stoner in “The Adventures of the Speckled Band.” Helen feels threatened by her stepfather, Dr. Roylott, and recalls that her sister died mysteriously two years earlier just before she was to be married: her dying words were “The speckled band!” Helen also tells of the Doctor's strange activities around the estate, where he houses a group of gypsies, constantly renovates the mansion, and studies the practice of using odd potions. After Helen leaves, the doctor arrives and threatens Holmes against investigating further. Holmes goes to a courthouse to examine the will of Helen's real father, then he and Watson go to the mansion, where they arrange to spend an evening in Helen's room. They discover a vent leading to Dr. Roylott's room and a bell cord that doesn't work. Pulling on the bell cord had opened the vent, however, through which a poisonous snake enters the room. Holmes fights it off, and the snake returns through the vent and bites Dr. Roylott, killing him. Holmes reveals that upon examining the will he had discovered that Mr. Stoner left a vast fortune, currently controlled by Dr. Roylott, to his daughters.

In “The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb,” a man appears in Watson's medical practice with a severed thumb and an amazing story about being lured with 50 guineas to serve as a coin consultant. Finding himself in strange and threatening surroundings, the man tries to escape severing his thumb in the process. Upon investigation, Holmes discovers that the whole adventure is a front for a counterfeit coin operation.

“The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor” follows the tribulations of Lord St. Simon, whose marriage to the daughter of a California millionaire ends abruptly when his new bride vanishes from the wedding breakfast. Holmes discovers that the girl is already married but thinks herself a widow; she then flees when she discovers that her husband is still alive.
A disturbed banker named Alexander Holder shows up and asks Holmes' help in “Adventure of the Beryl Coronet.” It seems that a nobleman asked Holder for a large loan secured by a beryl-encrusted crown. When three jewels are found to be missing from the crown, the banker's wayward son Arthur becomes a suspect. Holmes deduces from the evidence, including footprints in the snow, that the crime was actually committed by Holder's niece, who had befriended Arthur. The jewels are recovered and the innocent son is set free.

As Holmes accuses Watson of sensationalism in his accounts of their adventures, a note arrives from a woman who seeks the detective's advice on whether to accept a position as a governess. The proposal has an odd twist to that prompts her visit to Holmes. During “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches” it is discovered that she has been hired to impersonate a daughter who is locked up and deprived of her fortune.


Other Works by the Author:

WRITINGS:

"SHERLOCK HOLMES" SERIES; DETECTIVE FICTION


- *A Scandal in Bohemia* (also see below), Munro (New York, NY), 1895.

- *Sign of the Four, a Scandal in Bohemia, and Other Stories*, Burt (New York, NY), 1900.

- *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (novel; serialized in *Strand* magazine, 1901-02), illustrated by Sidney Paget, McClure, Phillips (New York, NY), 1902, with an introduction by Frank Condie Baxter, Doubleday, Page (Garden City, NY), 1926, illustrated by Gil


- Study in Scarlet, and, The Sign of Four, with a note by Dr. Joseph Bell, Appleton (New York, NY), 1902, reprinted, Dover (Mineola, NY), 2003.


- *Cases of Sherlock Holmes*, Webster (St. Louis, MO), 1947.
- *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, Hanover House (Garden City, NY), 1955.
- *The Best of Sherlock Holmes*, Franklin Library (Franklin Center, PA), 1977.


• *Sherlock Holmes*, illustrated by Sidney Paget, Knopf (New York, NY), 1996.

• *Selected Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, introduction by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Core Knowledge Foundation (Charlottesville, VA), 1997.


• *Favorite Sherlock Holmes Detective Stories*, Dover (Mineola, NY), 2000.


• *Quotable Sherlock*, compiled and edited by David W. Barber, illustrated by Sidney Paget, Quotable Press (Toronto, Ontario, Canada), 2001.

• *A Study in Scarlet; and, The Sign of Four*, Dover (Mineola, NY), 2003.


• *A Study in Scarlet; and, The Sign of Four*, Dover (Mineola, NY), 2003.


**NOVELS**

• *Beyond the City*, Wm. L. Allison (New York, NY), c. 1870s, published as *Beyond the City: The Idyll of a Suburb*, illustrated by Pamela Mattix, afterword by Howard Lachtmann, Gaslight (Bloomington, IN), 1982.
The Mystery of Cloomber, Ward & Downey, 1889, Munro (New York, NY), 1895, illustrated by Paul M. McCall, afterword by Jack Tracy, Gaslight (Bloomington, IN), 1980.

The Firm of Girdlestone (semiautobiographical), Lovell (New York, NY), 1890, illustrated by Paul M. McCall, afterword by Jack Tracy, Gaslight (Bloomington, IN), 1980.

The Doings of Raffles Haw (serialized in Answers, 1891-92), Lovell (New York, NY), 1891, illustrated by Paul M. McCall, afterword by John Bennett Shaw, Gaslight (Bloomington, IN), 1981.


The Stark Munro Letters: Being a Series of Sixteen Letters Written by J. Stark Munro, M.B., to his Friend and Former Fellow-Student, Herbert Swanborough, of Lowell, Massachusetts, during the Years 1881-1884 (autobiographical; also see below), Appleton (New York, NY), 1895, with an afterword by C. Frederick Kittle, illustrated by Lisa Rivard, Gaslight (Bloomington, IN), 1982.


The Tragedy of the Korosko (see also below), illustrated by Sidney Paget, Smith, Elder, 1898, reprinted, Gaslight (Bloomington, IN), 1983, published as A Desert Drama: Being the Tragedy of the Korosko, Lippincott (Philadelphia, PA), 1898.

A Duet with an Occasional Chorus, Appleton (New York, NY), 1899, with an afterword by Peter E. Blau, illustrated by Michele Lauber, Gaslight (Bloomington, IN), 1990.

Tragedy of the Korosko, and The Green Flag, and Other Stories of War and Sport, Appleton (New York, NY), 1902.


The Poison Belt (also see below), illustrated by Harry Rountree, Doran (New York, NY), 1913, with an introduction by John Dickson Carr and epilogue by Harlow Shapley, Macmillan (New York, NY), 1964, with an introduction by Katya Reimann, University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, NE), 2001.

The Adventure of the Six Napoleons, Collier (New York, NY), 1917.

The Dealings of Captain Sharkey, Doran (New York, NY), 1925.

The Land of Mist, Hutchinson (London, England), 1925, Doran (New York, NY), 1926.


The Lost World; and, The Poison Belt: Professor Challenger Adventures, introduction by William Gibson, Chronicle Books (San Francisco, CA), 1989.


HISTORICAL NOVELS


SHORT STORIES

• (With Campbell Rae Brown) *An Actor's Duel* [and] *The Winning Shot* (the former by Brown, the latter by Doyle), Dicks, 1894.
• *Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fancies of Medical Life* (horror; also see below), Appleton (New York, NY), 1894, reprinted, Books for Libraries Press (Freeport, NY), 1969.
• *The Surgeon of Gaster Fell* (also see below), Ivers (New York, NY), 1895.
- *The Green Flag and Other Stories of War and Sport* (see also above), McClure (New York, NY), 1900, Books for Libraries Press (Freeport, NY), 1969.
- *One Crowded Hour* (also see below), Paget (New York, NY), 1911.
- *Tales of Twilight and the Unseen*, J. Murray (London, England), 1922, published as *The Great Keinplatz Experiment and Other Tales of Twilight and the Unseen*, Doran (New York, NY), 1925.
- *The Macarot Deep and Other Stories* (also see below), Doubleday, Doran (New York, NY), 1929.
- *Sherlock Holmes, and Other Detective Stories*, Illustrated Editions (New York, NY), 1941.
• "Tales for a Winter's Night," Academy Chicago (Chicago, IL), 1989.

PLAYS

• "Foreign Policy" (one-act; based on Doyle's short story "A Question of Diplomacy"), first produced in London, England, 1893.
• "Waterloo" (one-act; based on Doyle's short story "A Straggler of '15"; first produced as A Story of Waterloo in Bristol, England, 1894), Samuel French (New York, NY), 1907.
• "Halves" (prologue and three acts; based on the story by James Payn), first produced in Aberdeen, Scotland, 1899.
• *A Duet (A Duologue)* (one-act comedy; based on Doyle's novel *A Duet with an Occasional Chorus*; first produced in London, England, 1902), Samuel French (New York, NY), 1903.


• *The Fires of Fate* (four-act; based on Doyle's novel *The Tragedy of the Korosko*), first produced in Liverpool, England, 1909.


• *It's Time Something Happened* (one-act), Appleton (New York, NY), 1925.

• *Exile: A Drama of Christmas Eve* (one-act), Appleton (New York, NY), 1925.


Also author of *Sir Charles Tregellis, Admiral Denver, The Stonor Case, The Lift, and Mrs. Thompson* (based on the novel of the same title by W. B. Maxwell).

**SPIRITUALISM**


• *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*, Doran (New York, NY), 1921, reprinted, Ronin (Berkeley, CA), 1988.

• *The Evidence for Fairies*, Doran (New York, NY), 1921.

• *Fairies Photographed*, Doran (New York, NY), 1921.

• *The Coming of the Fairies*, Doran (New York, NY), 1922, reprinted, Weiser, 1972, University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, NE), 2006.


• *Our American Adventure*, Doran (New York, NY), 1923.

• (Compiler) *The Spiritualists' Reader*, Two Worlds, 1924.

• *Our Second American Adventure*, Little, Brown (Boston, MA), 1924.


• *Pheneas Speaks: Direct Spirit Communications in the Family Circle*, Doran (New York, NY), 1927.


**OTHER**

• *Songs of Action* (poetry; also see below), Doubleday & McClure (New York, NY), 1898.


• *The Story of Mr. George Edalji*, privately printed, 1907, published as *The Case of Mr. George Edalji*, Blake, 1907.


• *The "Arch Adept" of the "First Degree.,”* De Laurence, Scott (Chicago, IL), 1910.

• *Songs of the Road* (poetry; also see below), Doubleday, Page (New York, NY), 1911.

• *The Passing of the Legions*, Paget (New York, NY), 1911.

• *The Case of Oscar Slater*, Hodder & Stoughton (New York, NY), 1912.

• *Great Britain and the Next War*, Small, Maynard, 1914.

• *To Arms!*, preface by F. E. Smith, Hodder & Stoughton (London, England), 1914.


• *Western Wanderings*, Doran (New York, NY), 1915.


• *The Origin and Outbreak of the War*, Doran (New York, NY), 1916.


• *The Guards Came Through and Other Poems* (also see below), J. Murray (London, England), 1919, Doran (New York, NY), 1920.

• *Fairies Photographed*, Doran (New York, NY), 1921.


• *Strange Studies from Life: Containing Three Hitherto Uncollected Tales Based on the Annals of True Crime*, additional material by Philip Trevor, edited and with an introduction by Peter Ruber, Candlelight Press, 1963.
• *Round the Red Lamp and Other Medical Writings*, edited with an introduction and notes by Robert Darby, Valancourt Books (Chicago, IL), 2007.

Contributor of works such as "The Truth about Sherlock Holmes" in a variety of genres to many magazines and newspapers, including Strand, Chambers's Journal, Harper's, Blackwood's, Saturday Evening Post, McClure's, London Society, Cornhill, Lippincott's, Boston Herald, Philadelphia Inquirer, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and New York Times. Contributor to What Irish Protestants Think: Speeches on Home Rule, Irish Press Agency (Westminster, England).

**MEDIA ADAPTATIONS:**

Many of Doyle's works have been adapted for film, including *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *His Last Bow*, *The Firm of Girdlestone*, and *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard*. Doyle's writings have also been adapted for plays, television (including a series based on *The Lost World*), and filmstrips. Several stories, novels, and
children's books have been based on the characters of Sherlock Holmes and others created by Doyle.

Discussion Questions:

A Scandal in Bohemia:
http://www.swosu.edu/sayre/students/orgs/docs/The%20Adventures%20of%20Sherlock%20Holmes%20Scandal%20in%20Bohemia%20questions.pdf

The Adventure of the Red-Headed League:
http://www.swosu.edu/sayre/students/orgs/docs/The%20Adventures%20of%20Sherlock%20Holmes%20The%20Red-Headed%20League%20questions.pdf

A Case of Identity:
http://www.swosu.edu/sayre/students/orgs/docs/The%20Adventures%20of%20Sherlock%20Holmes%20A%20Case%20of%20Identity%20questions.pdf

The Boscombe Valley Mystery:
http://www.swosu.edu/sayre/students/orgs/docs/The%20Adventures%20of%20Sherlock%20Holmes%20Boscombe%20Valley%20Mystery.pdf

The Five Orange Pips:
http://www.swosu.edu/sayre/students/orgs/docs/The%20Adventures%20of%20Sherlock%20Holmes%20the%20five%20orange%20pips%20questions.pdf

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle:
http://www.swosu.edu/sayre/students/orgs/docs/The%20Adventures%20of%20Sherlock%20Holmes%20the%20adventure%20of%20the%20blue%20carbuncle.pdf

The Adventure of the Speckled Band:
http://www.swosu.edu/sayre/students/orgs/docs/The%20Adventures%20of%20Sherlock%20Holmes%20the%20adventure%20of%20the%20speckled%20band.pdf
Related Readings at HMCPL:

*Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes* by Maria Konnikova 153.4 KON

*A Study in Sherlock: Stories Inspired by the Holmes Canon* by Laurie R. King M STU

*The Devil and Sherlock Holmes: Tales of Murder, Madness, and Obsession* by David Grann 081 GRA

*Sherlock Holmes for Dummies* by Steven Doyle 823.912 DOY

*The Murder Room: The Heirs of Sherlock Holmes Gather to Solve the World’s Most Perplexing Cold Cases* by Mike Capuzzo 363.2595 CAP

*Sherlock Holmes was Wrong: Reopening the Case of the Hound of the Baskervilles* by Pierre Bayard 823.912 BAY

Other Resources of Interest:


221B Baker Street: [http://221bakerstreet.org/](http://221bakerstreet.org/)
