

## Teacher's notes

## A Scandal in Bohemia

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



## SUMMARY

The fictional detective Sherlock Holmes was created by Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887, and is one of the most famous detectives in English literature. This collection of short stories featuring Sherlock Holmes and his friend Dr Watson is typical of Conan Doyle's writing of detective fiction. In 'A Scandal in Bohemia', Holmes is approached by royalty to solve a problem. 'The Red Headed League' is the tale of an ingenious deception. 'The Boscombe Lake Mystery' involves murder, blackmail and romance. 'The Blue Diamond' is the humorous tale of a theft which goes badly wrong. 'The Single Man' and 'The Copper Beeches' are mysteries involving strange disappearances and marriage problems. Holmes solves each mystery through his keen observation of tiny details and his instinctive insight into human nature.

## ABOUT ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was one of the most popular fiction writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was born into an artistic Irish Catholic family, on 22 May 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. After a strict Catholic education, Conan Doyle studied medicine at Edinburgh University, and became a doctor.

Conan Doyle had a resemblance to his fictional character Dr Watson, Holmes' faithful friend, both in nature and looks. He was a solid extrovert patriot, with strong views on things such as the importance of the British Empire, and the absurdity of some modern art. However, Conan Doyle's Irish ancestors gave him a wilder, Celtic streak that ran through his life and writings. Also, Conan Doyle was as keen as Holmes in his powers of observation.

After serving in the army in South Africa during the Boer War (1899-1902), when the British were fighting the Boers for control of land, Conan Doyle wrote two books defending the British side. In 1902 he was knighted for these works.

Conan Doyle later developed an interest in spiritualism while he was a doctor in Southsea, in the south of England. This was an interest that comforted him when his youngest son, Kingsley, died of pneumonia in the First World War (1914-18). He joined the Society for Psychical Research and for nearly 30 years carried out a series of experiments in telepathy and spiritual investigations. Finally, at the peak of his literary career, he wrote two

books on spiritualism - *The New Revelation* and *The Vital Message*.

Conan Doyle rather resented the success of his Sherlock Holmes books, feeling that they overshadowed his more important historical and scientific books. This was never more apparent than when he gave a lecture on spiritualism in Amsterdam shortly before his death in 1930. Ignoring the lecture's title, many of the questions from the audience were about Sherlock Holmes. Conan Doyle refused to answer them and told the audience he had nothing more to say about the detective or his cases.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Few fictional characters are as well known around the world as the private amateur detective Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes was 'born' in 1887 when Conan Doyle's first full-length detective story *A Study in Scarlet* was published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*.

At this time Victorian society was in a state of unease as new thoughts and ideas threatened to undermine traditional beliefs. The Industrial Revolution had brought about the rapid development of industry, railways, commerce and engineering. Along with this came revolutionary scientific theories which shocked many people. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published in 1859, put forward the theory of evolution, and so questioned the Christian beliefs that had been dominant until then. Many wealthy Victorian families also felt threatened by the rise of the new class of rich factory owners. These owners often capitalized on the poor, particularly women and children. The Victorian conscience was eventually stirred by the revelation of this exploitation in the works of authors such as Charles Dickens and Charles Kingsley.

Tales of mystery, where social problems were rarely confronted, grew in popularity during the Victorian age. The success of Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White*, published in 1860, led to further novels of mystery, crime, detection and suspense. And when Sherlock Holmes solved his first mystery in *Strand* magazine in 1891, he was an immediate success with readers. Such were Conan Doyle's creative powers that people often wrote to the editor of *Strand* asking if Holmes was a real person.

Dr Watson, who narrates all the Sherlock Holmes stories, acts as a foil to Holmes. The sparkling brilliance of Holmes's sharp mind is exaggerated as he explains to the

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solid Watson in minute detail how he has solved each mystery. This is also a clever literary device to enable Holmes to explain to the reader his thoughts, plans and conclusions.

Holmes' solution to the mysteries he is presented with are always reached through reason, but because of Conan Doyle's interest in the supernatural, there is often an air of the irrational about them. They are written with imagination and sometimes with a sense of the macabre.

Most of the Holmes tales are short stories. 'A Scandal in Bohemia' was the first to appear in *Strand* in 1891. This story was immediately popular, causing a rise in magazine sales, and Conan Doyle was able to give up working as a doctor and become a writer.

'A Scandal in Bohemia' is unusual in two ways. Firstly, it shows someone defeating Holmes. Secondly, the victor is a woman, and Holmes has previously been somewhat disparaging about females. Although the crimes in this selection of short stories are all different, they are connected by several themes. Marital issues are a common theme to four. In two of these - 'The Boscombe Lake Mystery' and 'The Copper Beeches' - the marital disputes hinge on disagreements between a child and their parents. In 'A Scandal in Bohemia' and 'The Boscombe Lake Mystery', blackmail is the common theme.

## 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. Further supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found on the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.*

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair of students one fact about Arthur Conan Doyle from the introduction to the book and from this Factsheet. Students have ten minutes to collect as many facts as they can by asking other students questions. Then they return to their seats and write down as many things as they can remember.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## 'A Scandal in Bohemia'

On separate cards, write different things that describe the people in the story. For example - 'He is married' on one card, 'He tells the story' on another, etc. On other cards write the names of the people in the story. Put students into small groups. Ask them to put the right cards together.

## 'The Red-Headed League'

Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss the following question: Do you feel sorry for Mr Wilson? Why? Why not? After 10 minutes or so, have a whole-class discussion about this.

## 'The Boscombe Lake Mystery'

Divide students into pairs. Teach them the word *headline*. Ask students to look at the newspaper story on pages 33/34 of the book and to write a headline for this story. Compare ideas.

## 'The Blue Diamond'

Divide students into small groups. Some groups write six questions about the story, while other groups write six answers. Groups exchange papers and either answer the questions or write questions for the answers.

## 'The Single Man'

Divide the story into a number of sections. Divide the class into small groups. Give each group one section of the story and ask them to write three or four simple sentences - each on a single piece of paper - about what happens in their section. Groups give their set of sentences to another group. Groups put the sentences in order. Finally, read through all the sentences in the right order with the class.

## 'The Copper Beeches'

Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss the following question, then compare answers as a class.

Imagine that someone offers you a job, but wants you to change the way you look. Will you take the job? Why? Why not?

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Divide the students into small groups. Ask each group to choose their favourite story and to retell it through the eyes of a different person in the story. Then ask students to discuss why the stories are always told by Dr Watson. Compare answers as a class.

## Glossary

*It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)*

## 'A Scandal in Bohemia'

**carriage** (n) a vehicle with wheels that is pulled by a horse

**Count** (n) a man from a very high family in Europe

**lawyer** (n) a person who helps people with the law

**mask** (n) something that covers your face to hide it

**priest** (n) somebody who works for the Church

**ring** (n) you wear this on your finger

**scandal** (n) something that happens which people think is very bad and surprising

**smoke-bomb** (n) a thing which makes a lot of smoke when it breaks open

**witness** (n) somebody who watches when other people write their name on an important piece of paper, and then writes their own name

## 'The Red-Headed League'

**Inspector** (n) a police officer

**league** (n) a group of people who are the same or think the same in some way

## 'The Blue Diamond'

**diamond** (n) a very expensive clear hard stone

## 'The Single Man'

**camp** (n) a place where people live in tents

**claim** (n) to have a right to have something because it belongs to you

**Duke** (n) a man from a very high family

**Lord** (n) a man from a very high family or a man with a very good job

## 'The Copper Beeches'

**copper beech** (n) a tall tree with red-brown leaves



## Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

### Activities before reading the book

Work with another student.

What do you know about Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson? Talk together and make notes. Compare with other students. Compare as a class.

### Activities while reading the book

'A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA'

Page 1 to the bottom of page 8

- Answer these questions.
  - Why does Dr Watson visit Holmes?
  - Why does the King of Bohemia visit Holmes?
  - What does Holmes find out about Irene Adler when he dresses as a driver?
  - What does Holmes want Watson to do at Briony Lodge?
  - How is Holmes dressed when he goes to Briony Lodge?
- Write down five things that tell Holmes that his visitor is the King of Bohemia.
- Talk to another student.  
What do you think Holmes plans to do to get the photograph?

Pages 9-14

- Put these sentences into the right order.
  - There is a fight.
  - People carry Holmes into Irene's house.
  - Irene Adler's carriage arrives.
  - Holmes finds out where the photo is.
  - Holmes, who is dressed as a priest, goes to help Irene.
  - Watson throws the smoke bomb and shouts 'Fire!'
- How does Holmes find out where the photograph is?
- Talk to another student.  
Is it a surprise to you that the only person ever to beat Holmes is a woman? Why/why not?

'THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE'

Page 15 to the bottom of page 23

- What are the names of these people?
  - He works for Mr Wilson.
  - He started the Red-Headed League.
  - He has a shop in Coburg Square.
  - He asks Mr Wilson to copy the dictionary.
- Answer these questions.
  - How many hours a week does Mr Wilson work for the Red-Headed League?
  - What happens after 8 weeks?

## A Scandal in Bohemia



- What is the total amount of money that Mr Wilson gets for copying the dictionary?
- Talk to another student.  
What do you think is the answer to this mystery? Try to guess.

Pages 24-29

- Put these numbers in the right sentences. Try not to look at the book.  
4, 10, 30,000, 6, 2
  - There are ..... gold pieces in boxes under the City Bank.
  - Watson goes to Baker Street just before ..... o'clock.
  - The bank bought the gold ..... months earlier.
  - ..... policemen wait at the shop.
  - ..... men are planning to steal the gold.
- Work in pairs.  
*Student A:* You are John Clay.  
*Student B:* You are the red-headed 'Duncan Ross'.  
Imagine that it is four months before the crime. Plan the crime together.

'THE BOSCOMBE LAKE MYSTERY'

Page 30 to bottom of page 36

- Answer these questions.
  - Why do the police think that Charles McCarthy's son killed him?
  - Does James McCarthy say that he killed his father?
  - What did James see about 30 feet from his father's body?
  - Why did James have a fight with his father?
  - What good news does James hear from his 'wife'?
- Talk with another student.  
Who do you think killed Mr McCarthy? Why?

Pages 37-42

- How does Holmes know that :
  - the stone was used to kill Mr McCarthy?
  - the man who killed McCarthy uses his left hand?
  - the man who killed McCarthy has a bad right leg?
  - the man who killed McCarthy is tall?
- Talk with another student.  
Imagine that James and Alice learn the truth about their fathers. You are James and Alice. Have their conversation.

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## 'THE BLUE DIAMOND'

## Page 43 to the end of page 49

- Put the two halves of these sentences together:
  - Peterson was walking along Goodge Street ...
  - A chicken and a hat ...
  - Peterson looks like a policeman ...
  - Peterson is very excited ...
  - The police think Horner stole the diamond ...
  - Holmes knows that Henry Baker did not steal the diamond ...
  - Holmes makes Mr Breckenridge angry.
  - ... because he once stole money from a hotel room.
  - ... when he saw two men attack a tall man.
  - ... so that he tells him where he bought his chickens.
  - ... because he finds a diamond in the chicken.
  - ... because he only wants to eat the chicken.
  - ... because he is dressed as a hotel doorman.
  - ... were left on the ground.
- Talk to another student.  
Who do you think stole the diamond? Why?

## Pages 50-54

- Choose the right word in *italics*:
  - Ryder works as a *doorman/waiter* at the hotel.
  - Ryder has a *sister/brother* who keeps chickens.
  - Ryder is a *small/tall* man.
  - Ryder's *sister's/friend's* name is Oakshott.
- Talk to another student.  
Why did Holmes let Ryder go at the end? What does this say about Holmes?

## 'THE SINGLE MAN'

## Page 55 to the end of page 59

- Find the mistakes in this piece of writing and correct them:  
Robert Simon is the son of the Duke of Windsor. He is forty-two years old and plans to marry Hatty, the second daughter of a rich Australian. On the day before the wedding, Hatty jumps in the lake.
- Where do you think Hatty has gone? Why? Talk with another student.

## Pages 60-67

- What is important about these things?
  - a note
  - a newspaper report
  - flowers
- Answer these questions.
  - What does 'jumping a claim' mean?
  - Why is this true: 'There is no Lady Simon and there never was such a person.' ?
  - What does Lord Simon say that shows he is not really in love with Hatty?

- Talk with another student. One of you is Frank, the other Hatty. It is the day of the wedding. You meet and talk about what has happened since you last saw the other person.

## 'THE COPPER BEECHES'

## Page 68 to bottom of page 74

- Put names with these descriptions.
  - fat and kind
  - pretty and young
  - quiet and sad
  - big, black and dangerous
- Who says this? Who to? Why?
  - 'I don't like short hair.'
  - 'We shall see her again very soon.'
  - 'Will you go and put it on?'
  - 'There's a man on the road looking at Miss Hunter.'
- Talk to another student.  
What do you think is happening at Copper Beeches? Why are these strange things happening?

## Pages 75-80

- Answer these questions
  - Why does Mr Rucastle say to Miss Hunter, 'If you do, I'll throw you to the dog.'?
  - When Mr and Mrs Rucastle and Mr Toller are out, Holmes, Watson and Miss Hunter go into the upstairs room. What do they see?
  - How does Watson save Mr Rucastle?
  - Why doesn't Alice Rucastle's father want her to marry Mr Fowler?
- Work as a pair.  
*Student A:* You are Mrs Toller  
*Student B:* You are Mr Fowler  
You meet in the village and plan Miss Rucastle's escape. Have the conversation.

## Activities after reading the book

- Talk with another student. Look up *characteristic* in your dictionary.  
What characteristics make Sherlock Holmes a great detective?
- Work with another student. Close your books. Who can answer these questions first?
  - What does Peterson's wife find in a chicken?
  - What does Mr Wilson do for four hours each day for eight weeks?
  - Who does the King of Bohemia want to marry?
  - Who kills Mr McCarthy?
  - What happens after the wedding of Lord Simon?
  - What gives Mr Rucastle's house its name?
  - How and where did McCarthy and John Turner first meet?



"A Scandal in Bohemia" is the first short story, and the third overall work, featuring Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional detective Sherlock Holmes. It is the first of the 56 Holmes short stories written by Doyle and the first of 38 Sherlock Holmes works illustrated by Sidney Paget. The story is notable for introducing the character of Irene Adler, who is one of the most notable female characters in the Sherlock Holmes series, despite appearing in only one story. Doyle ranked "A Scandal in Bohemia" fifth.

Dr. Watson visits Sherlock Holmes, who shows him a letter he has received asking for his assistance. The writer of the letter appears in disguise, but Holmes recognizes him as the King of Bohemia. The King explains that five years ago he became involved with Irene Adler; now that he is engaged to be married, he fears that she will use a photograph showing him and her together as blackmail against him. He pleads for Holmes to retrieve the photograph. Learning that Adler has just married Godfrey Norton, a lawyer, in a quick and inconspicuous ceremony, Holmes concocts a plan to determine where she is.

To Sherlock Holmes she is always THE woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were