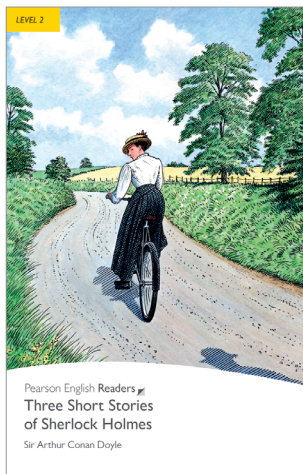


## Three Short Stories of Sherlock Holmes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



### About the author

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 and imaginative stories of mystery and suspense.

### Summary

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

In the first story, a young woman called Mary Sutherland comes to Holmes's Baker Street home with a problem concerning her fiancé, Mr Hosmer Angel. On the day of their wedding Mr Hosmer disappeared at the church and has not been seen or heard of 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 continued to live with her mother and stepfather. Mr Windibank admits to what he has done, 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. Soames 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 quickly realises 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 been offered a job in South Africa.

In the final story, a beautiful young woman, Miss Violet Smith, comes to Holmes because a man has been following her on a bicycle. Miss Smith works for Mr Carruthers at his home in Farnham. Both Mr Carruthers and another man, Mr Woodley, want to marry Violet, but she is already engaged to someone else. First Watson, then Holmes go to Farnham to investigate.

In the dramatic conclusion to the story, Violet 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 Violet.

## Three Short Stories of Sherlock Holmes

### Background and themes

Most of the Sherlock Holmes stories are set in London in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The mention of the name of Sherlock Holmes is enough to conjure up a mysterious atmosphere 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 form an important theme in two of the stories. Typically, Doyle wrote about the professional classes (doctors, lawyers, teachers) with whom he was most familiar. This class of people was 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 paved the way for many 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 problem, and gathers a set of clues. Whilst the reader (and Dr Watson) is led in one direction, the story develops in an unpredictable way and ends with a surprising conclusion. This 'twist in the tail' keeps the reader 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.

### Discussion activities

#### *Sherlock Holmes and the Strange Mr Angel*, (pages 1–12)

##### Pages 1–8

##### Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask students what they know about Sherlock Holmes. Ask them when the stories are set. Then have the students work in small groups and give them 10 minutes to come up with a list of differences between life today and life in 1900. After 10 minutes, ask the groups to present their lists to the rest of the class.
- Describe the picture:** Put the students into pairs. Get each pair to look at the picture on page 5. After three minutes student A takes the book and asks student B questions about it. Student B should answer as many questions as possible without looking at the picture.

##### After reading

- Role play:** In pairs, students write out the dialogue between Holmes and Watson on page 1 as if it were a stage play. Then each pair performs the dialogue until they can do it without reading the text.
- Write:** In groups of three, have students look at the picture on page 5 again 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 the church. Where do they think he has gone?

##### Pages 9–12

##### Before reading

- Guess:** *Who is the mysterious Mr Angel? Why did he want to keep his relationship with Miss Sutherland a secret, and why did he leave her at the church?*

##### After reading

- Discuss:** Have students talk about their opinions of the characters. *Does Miss Sutherland deserve our sympathy or was she very stupid to fall in love with a man like Angel?*
- Read carefully:** Students write a short summary of the story as if it were an entry in Sherlock Holmes's diary.
- Research: Find out how things have changed.** *How rich was Miss Sutherland? Use the Internet to find out what you could buy with £100 in 1900. What can you buy with £100 today? How have relationships with parents changed since 1900? At what age did children leave home? Did they wait until they were married to leave home? Are parents more protective now?*

#### *Sherlock Holmes and the Important Exam Paper*, (pages 13–26)

##### Pages 13–22

##### Before reading

- Discuss:** Have students work in small groups. Each student in the group should give their opinions of

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exams. How do they feel the day before an important exam?

- 10 Pair work:** Put students into pairs. Have each student write a list five subjects they are studying or have studied. Students take turns to ask and answer questions about each other's lists. *What is/was your best subject? Which subject do/did you find most interesting, etc.*

### After reading

- 11 Write:** Have students work in pairs. Students imagine they are Sherlock Holmes, writing in his notebook after Watson has gone to bed (page 22). They write a brief description of each of the following characters – *Bannister, Gilchrist, McLaren, Ras*.

### Pages 22–26

#### Before reading

- 12 Guess:** In pairs, students imagine they are Sherlock Holmes and try to work out who tried to copy the exam paper and why. Each pair explains their decision to the rest of the class.

#### After reading

- 13 Discuss:** Put students in small groups to discuss the following question for 10 minutes: *Was Holmes right to allow the guilty person to go without punishment?* At the end of the ten minutes, have a representative from each group give the opinion of the group to the whole class. At the end of the discussion, take a class vote on the question.
- 14 Role play:** In pairs, students write and then play out the conversation between Bannister and Gilchrist after Bannister finds him in Soames's room.
- 15 Write:** Have students work in pairs to write the letter that Gilchrist writes to Soames (see page 24). When they have finished, each pair exchanges letters with another pair. They then write a short reply from Soames to Gilchrist.

### *Sherlock Holmes and the Dangerous Road,*

(pages 27–39)

### Pages 27–34

#### Before reading

- 16 Discuss:** Read the title and imagine what the story will be about. *What makes a road dangerous?* Use the board to write up vocabulary items as they occur in the discussion. If necessary, prompt the students with suggestions such as *weather conditions, junctions, bad drivers, muggers, etc.*

#### After reading

- 17 Read carefully:** Write these characters names on the board: *Violet Smith, Ralph Smith, Mr Carruthers, Mr Woodley, Cyril, Mr Williamson, Sherlock Holmes, Dr Watson*. Put the students 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 give one piece of information about each character (e.g. 'she is a beautiful young woman') and explain the nature of the relationship (e.g. 'they are friends', 'she works for him' etc.). Then ask a student from each group in turn to do the same thing until there are no more links.

- 18 Discuss:** Talk about Violet's decision to go and work for Mr Carruthers. Have students come up with reasons for and against. Have them work in small groups first and then open up the discussion to the whole class and put the students' suggestions on the board.

### Pages 34–39

- 19 Guess:** Have students predict whether the man on the bicycle is a goody or a baddy. Make sure they give reasons for their predictions.

#### After reading

- 20 Write:** Working in pairs, students write the statement that Holmes will give to the police in which he tries to help Carruthers. Then one student from each pair reads their statement out loud to the rest of the class.
- 21 Discuss:** Talk about opinions of the three stories. Have students put the stories in order of preference and then have them work in small groups to share and justify their preferences.
- 22 Discuss:** Who is your favourite character in the book? Who is your least favourite? Working individually, have the students write some words and sentences about each character. Then put the students into small groups to explain to each other why they like or dislike the characters.
- 23 Write:** Have the students work in pairs. Each pair chooses one of the pictures in the book and writes about the picture and tries to explain the story. They should write sentences to answer the following questions: *Who are the people in the picture? Where are they? What are they doing? Are they good or bad? What happens next?* When they have finished, one student from each pair reads their sentences to the whole class.
- 24 Discuss:** What do you think about the two women, Miss Smith and Miss Sutherland? Are they like women today? How are they different? Have students work in small groups first. Draw two columns on the board labelled 'similarities' and 'differences'. Then ask each group to report to the whole class and put words into each column as the discussion progresses.