

A FAMILY STUDY IN THE CHARLOTTE MASON TRADITION

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES



by Arthur Conan Doyle

A Living Book Study for Year 8, with a Year 7 Support Tier

Welcome. This Living Book Study of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes is written for families teaching children of different ages side by side, with a core plan pitched at Year 8 and a lighter-touch tier for Year 7.

In the Charlotte Mason tradition, we keep the feast wide alongside the mysteries: history, science, geography and thoughtful conversation sit next to writing, drama and discussion. Because this book is a collection of twelve self-contained stories, it is easy to read a whole case in a single sitting.

A few steady habits will support progress:

- For Year 7: enjoy the puzzles - try to solve each case before Holmes does, and notice the clues you missed.
- For Year 8: keep a 'case journal', and start noticing how Conan Doyle builds suspense and how the detective story is put together.
- For GCSE (Years 10-11): use the extension tasks to analyse Conan Doyle's craft and the Victorian world of the stories - Sherlock Holmes features on several English courses.

How to use this plan

- Follow the suggested 3-week plan of twelve stories, or dip into the cases in any order.
- Print the accompanying Learning Booklet for a response page per story.
- Use the Independent Study slides if a student is working through the plan on their own.
- A note for parents: these are Victorian crime stories with mild peril and some period attitudes. 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' features an opium den; 'The Five Orange Pips' uses the real Ku Klux Klan as its villains, which is a chance to discuss that history honestly; and a couple of stories carry the colonial assumptions of the 1890s. Nothing is graphic, but a look ahead will help you frame these for your child.

About the Text

Published in 1892, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes gathers twelve short stories first printed in The Strand Magazine, where they made Holmes a sensation. Narrated by his friend Dr Watson, each story sets the brilliant, observant detective a fresh puzzle, solved by reason, disguise and an almost scientific eye for detail.

These stories helped invent the modern detective story, and Holmes remains one of the most famous characters in all fiction. They are also a vivid picture of late-Victorian Britain - its fogs and hansom cabs, its class divisions, and its far-flung empire, whose secrets often follow characters home.

Text used: the 1892 collection is out of copyright and freely available from Project Gutenberg and Standard Ebooks (see Helpful Websites, below).

Topics included: History (Victorian London, policing and the Empire), Science (observation, deduction and early forensics), Geography (London and beyond), Literacy (the detective genre and suspense), PSHE (justice and mercy), Art, and Drama.

Year 7 Support Tier

A younger or less confident reader can enjoy the cases as puzzles and adventures. These activities build the skills of observation and deduction that make Holmes so remarkable.

Activity	Learning Areas	Description	Resources
Observation game	Science + Thinking	Look at a tray of objects for thirty seconds, then list everything you can remember - Holmes-style observation.	A tray, various small objects
Draw 221B Baker Street	Art	Design Holmes and Watson's famous sitting room, full of clues, chemistry gear and a violin.	Paper, pens
Write a secret code	Literacy + Maths	Invent a simple cipher, write a message in it, and challenge someone to crack it.	Paper, pens
Detective science	Science	Take fingerprints with a pencil and sticky tape, and find out how they help solve crimes.	Pencil, paper, clear tape
Act out a deduction	Drama	Perform a scene where 'Holmes' guesses surprising facts about someone from small clues.	A open space

Year 8 Subject Activity Map

Literacy:

- Keep a 'case journal': for each story, note the clues, your own guess, and how Holmes actually solved it.
- Study the detective-story formula: a puzzle, a trail of clues, a red herring, and a reveal. Find each part in a story.
- Notice how Dr Watson, as narrator, keeps things from us to build suspense. Why tell the stories through Watson, not Holmes?
- Write your own short mystery, planting fair clues for the reader to spot.

History:

- Research late-Victorian London: fog, gas lamps, hansom cabs and the new railways.
- Research the beginnings of the detective police and Scotland Yard, and how real detection was changing.
- Several cases reach back to the Empire and abroad (Australia, India, America). Pick one and research the real history behind it.
- Record key dates into your Book of Centuries.

Science:

- Holmes is an early forensic scientist. Research how observation, fingerprints and evidence are used to solve real crimes.
- Try Holmes's method: study an everyday object closely and list everything it tells you about its owner.
- In 'The Speckled Band', the solution turns on science. Work out how the clues fit together.

Geography:

- Map the London of the stories, from Baker Street outwards.
- Several cases move into the English countryside. Compare how Holmes talks about crime in the city and the country.

RE / PSHE:

- Discuss justice and mercy: in 'The Blue Carbuncle', Holmes lets a thief go. Was he right?
- Discuss how the stories play with appearances - disguises, double lives, and the danger of judging by looks.
- Discuss the cases Holmes does not fully win. What do they add to the collection?

Art / Drama:

- Illustrate a famous scene - 221B Baker Street, or the reveal in 'The Speckled Band'.
- Act out a client bringing a strange problem to Holmes and Watson.
- Design a front cover for the collection in the style of a Victorian magazine.

GCSE (Years 10-11) Extension:

- Sherlock Holmes stories appear on several GCSE English courses. Plan a response to: 'How does Conan Doyle create and sustain suspense?'
- Analyse how Holmes is characterised through Watson's admiring narration.
- Explore how the stories reflect their Victorian context - class, policing, empire and the fear of crime.
- Compare two stories, and argue which is the more satisfying mystery, and why.

Possible Medium-Term Plan (3 Weeks)

The collection has twelve stories. This plan reads one complete story per day.

Week 1 - Stories 1-4: First Cases

Day	Read (story)	Core Task	Extension / Cross-curricular
Day 1	A Scandal in Bohemia.	Narration: how does Irene Adler manage to outwit Holmes himself?	Discuss: why does Holmes always afterwards call her 'the woman'?
Day 2	The Red-Headed League.	Discuss: spot the real clues hidden inside a ridiculous job advertisement.	Literacy: what makes a detective puzzle feel clever and fair?
Day 3	A Case of Identity.	Discuss: how does Holmes read tiny details that everyone else misses?	Science: try Holmes-style close observation of an everyday object.
Day 4	The Boscombe Valley Mystery.	Narration: retell how Holmes clears the man everyone believes is guilty.	PSHE: discuss the danger of jumping to conclusions about guilt.

Week 2 - Stories 5-8: Danger and Disguise

Day	Read (story)	Core Task	Extension / Cross-curricular
Day 5	The Five Orange Pips.	History: research secret societies - the villains here are the real Ku Klux Klan.	Discuss: this is a case Holmes does not fully win. Why include it?
Day 6	The Man with the Twisted Lip.	Discuss: the strange double life of the beggar who is also a gentleman.	History: research poverty, disguise and the underworld of Victorian London.
Day 7	The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle.	Narration: follow the chain of clues from a lost hat to a jewel in a Christmas goose.	PSHE: Holmes lets the thief go free. Was he right to show mercy?
Day 8	The Adventure of the Speckled Band.	Discuss: how does Holmes solve this famous locked-room mystery?	Science: work out how the clues - a whistle, a saucer of milk, a 'band' - fit together.

Week 3 - Stories 9-12: Clever Crimes

Day	Read (story)	Core Task	Extension / Cross-curricular
Day 9	The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb.	Narration: retell the engineer's terrifying night at the lonely house.	Discuss: why is this case unusual compared with the others?

Day 10	The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor.	Discuss: a bride vanishes at her own wedding breakfast. How does Holmes explain it?	History: research marriage, money and class in Victorian society.
Day 11	The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet.	Discuss: how do appearances deceive - who is really guilty, and who is wronged?	PSHE: discuss trust and suspicion within a family.
Day 12	The Adventure of the Copper Beeches.	Narration: what is so strange about the governess's new household?	Wrap-up: what makes Sherlock Holmes such a lasting, famous character?

Helpful Websites

- Full text (free, out of copyright): Project Gutenberg - www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1661 and Standard Ebooks - standardebooks.org
- Victorian London and daily life: Museum of London - www.museumoflondon.org.uk
- The history of policing and detection: The National Archives - www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- Arthur Conan Doyle and the Strand stories: The British Library - www.bl.uk
- Fingerprints and forensic science: search a trusted science site or encyclopedia

Glossary

- Case Journal: a notebook where you record the clues, your own guess, and Holmes's solution for each story.
- Book of Centuries: a timeline in a book, taken from the Charlotte Mason tradition, where children add historical figures and important dates as they meet them.
- Deduction: reasoning from small observed facts to a larger conclusion - Holmes's great skill.
- Red herring: a false clue placed to mislead the reader or the detective.
- Forensics: the use of scientific methods and evidence to investigate crime.
- The Strand Magazine: the popular monthly magazine where these stories first appeared, with illustrations.

Other Living Book Studies in the Series

- Great Expectations by Charles Dickens
- Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
- Dracula by Bram Stoker
- The War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells
- The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson (GCSE)