

# SHERLOCK HOLMES

## Cracking an Ancient Case

Post-Exhibit Field Trip: Grades 9-12  
Extensions for Grades 6-8

*In “The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual,” a criminal’s trail leads Sherlock Holmes to an ancient treasure. In this lesson, students apply Holmes’ methods to academic sources and explore a real-life historical mystery.*

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Learn to “interrogate” different sources and assess their strengths and validity
- Cite textual information in support of an argument
- Produce a persuasive and informative essay with proper citations

### TIME REQUIRED

Pre-Lesson:  
Reading  
Assignment

Lesson Plan:  
~60 minutes

Post-Lesson:  
Writing  
Assignment

### PROGRAM FORMAT

**Segment**

Introduction  
Interrogating a Source  
The Investigation

**Format**

Solving a Riddle  
Group Discussion  
Group or Individual Activity

**Time**

5-20 min  
20 min  
10-20 min

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7	Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as verbally in order to address a question or solve a problem.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

## SUPPLIES

Supplies	Amount	Notes
"The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual" short story	1 per student	See the Resources section.
Internet access (optional)	1 per student or 1 web-enabled projector	If internet access is unavailable, print sources can be substituted.
Various examples of "good" and "bad" print sources (optional)	1 per student	

## ADVANCE PREPARATION

### Previous Class:

- Students should read "The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual," in class or for homework.

### Notes and Hints:

- This lesson can be modified to accommodate varying levels of classroom technology access. It is increasingly common for students to use web sources for research, so it is particularly useful to have the students use laptops or classroom computers to complete the lesson, but an instructor can easily lead the discussion with a computer-connected projector. If computer access is limited or unavailable, the lesson can also be done with a variety of print sources.

## SETUP

- Write the following riddle on the board. (See the Resources section on page 13 for the solution.)

*Who was he?  
A notable Boar.*

*Who told his tale?  
Avon's son.*

*Who was his foe?  
A red Rose.*

*Where did he rest?  
Beneath Jaguars and  
Vauxhalls.*

*What did he take?  
Edward's seat.*

## INTRODUCTION

5-20 minutes

Notes

Suggested script is shaded.

**Important points or questions are in bold.**

*Suggested answers are in italics.*

We have provided a riddle for students to solve that echoes the style of the riddle in “The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual.” Students can work in groups to solve it, using web searches, the books in the school library, or other reference materials.

The answer to the riddle is King Richard III, whose bones were recently discovered beneath an English parking lot. While the students are solving the riddle, the instructor can queue up one of the videos listed in the Resources section, which discuss the excavation and discovery of the King’s remains and the forensic science used to confirm his identity. This discovery was set in motion by The Richard III Society, a group of historians and laypeople, a great example of how anyone can help solve a “mystery from history”!

Write the riddle on the board. Break the students into groups and have them work to solve the riddle. Once the riddle is solved by one of the groups, bring the class together.

In “The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual,” Sherlock Holmes follows an ancient riddle, discovers an attempted burglary, solves a murder, and uncovers a priceless treasure. In reality, the crown of Charles I was almost certainly melted down following his execution in 1649. But scientists, archeologists, and historians are still solving historical mysteries using the methods employed by Holmes in the story: careful observation, deductive reasoning, and a little imagination. And there are plenty of mysteries left to solve!

Ask the “winning” group to reveal the answer to the riddle. Students can then view the clip (or clips) of the discovery of Richard III’s bones or the instructor can read from an article about the discovery. Suggestions for relevant clips and articles can be found in the Resources

section below.

**What are some other “mysteries from history?”** *Who built Stonehenge; who was Jack the Ripper; what happened to the colony at Roanoke, etc.*

Tell the students that their eventual assignment will be to choose an “unsolved mystery” from any point in history and investigate it using a variety of different sources.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

### Interrogating a Source

20 minutes

When Sherlock Holmes is investigating Richard Brunton, he wants to know everything he can about the man. The more he learns, the more accurate his deductions are. He can make predictions about Brunton’s behavior that are founded on an understanding of the man’s character. He is then able to confirm these guesses. When we are trying to solve our own mysteries, we want to make sure that we have the most reliable and accurate information supporting our deductions. We have to treat every source as a suspect.

Thoughts for discussion:

#### **Is the source relevant?**

That is, does the source pertain to the topic you are researching, or is there only a passing mention of the topic? It is alright to only take only one or two facts from an article, book, or website, but a resource that is specially focused on your topic is likely to be more accurate.

#### **How old is the source? Is it possible the source is outdated? Is this edition the newest version of the source?**

An older source is not necessarily a bad source! However, a more recent source is more likely to have up-to-date information, especially if the subject relates to technology or science. Try to find the most recent edition of a source, if possible.

### **Is there an author listed? What do we know about the author?**

An author biography, in a book or via an online search, is full of clues about the author's credibility. A biography may note that this topic is a specialty of the author's or that the author has an academic connection to the topic. If an author is not listed, be wary of the source. For example, Wikipedia can give you a quick answer, but the information on the site is crowd sourced, which means that any person can contribute to it, regardless of their qualifications. When an author puts his or her name on a book or article, he or she takes responsibility for the information in it.

If the author's name is unavailable, the information can still be valid. Does the information come from a government body, university, or museum?

### **Does the information deviate significantly from the other sources?**

A source with new information or a different slant on a topic does not mean the source is untrustworthy. However, information that contradicts the "conventional wisdom" on a topic should be vetted very carefully. Was the source recently published? Is the author reputable? If an author is presenting revolutionary information, he or she should address that fact and be able to defend the new information or theories.

### **How is the information in the source presented? Has the author used correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation? Does the publication "look" professional?**

A qualified author or journalist will present the information in a professional manner. If the article is on a website that does not seem professional (i.e., a personal blog or a public forum), this source is probably not an ideal starting place for research.

### **Where was the source published? How do we know if a website or publication is a credible one?**

Just because a publication is well known or popular, it does not necessarily mean that the information is correct. Seek out publications that are specific to your topic. Academic and professional journals are an excellent source of information. Many of these publications require

peer review, which means that an unbiased source will check to make sure the claims in an article are accurate. Your library likely has access to a number of databases that can connect you to reliable sources.

### **Does the author provide a list of their own sources?**

Academic authors will usually list the sources that they used for their research in a Bibliography or References section. This method allows other scholars to check their work and keeps the author accountable. Looking at Bibliography or References sections can lead you to other relevant sources from your own research, too.

### **Is the source “sponsored” by a specific company or organization? How might that affect the source’s orientation?**

Check to see if the source is labeled as “Sponsored Content” or is found on the website of an organization that might have an interest in providing a specific “slant” on a topic. Seek out sources that are unlikely to have a bias. For example, a website for a soda company might feature an article on the health benefits of caffeine, but a better source for information on the topic would be a reputable medical journal.

### **Is the source a “primary” or “secondary” source?**

A primary source is a first-hand account, like a report of the results of an experiment, a first-hand description of an experience or time period, or a creative work produced during a certain period. A secondary source refers to analysis or interpretation of a work, or a second-hand account of an experience or time period. Neither type of source is inherently more accurate than the other, but for certain subjects, the distinction is important to consider.

## GROUP ACTIVITY

## The Investigation

10-20 minutes

Depending on the time and resources available, the students may apply this line of questioning to a web source. Students can do this process individually (if laptops or a computer lab are available), in groups (if only

a few computers are available), or the instructor can lead the class in examining a few websites together (if internet projection is available).

For the best results, have a few “good” and “bad” website options for the students to choose from (but do not say which are which!), to avoid unfocused or irresponsible web use. A great example of a “bad” site is the official site of “The Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus,” a hoax website that at first glance appears credible (see the Resources section for the web address).

The students should be encouraged to apply this process to the sources they choose for the research assignment below.

If the students do not have access to the Internet in the classroom, there are plenty of “good” and “bad” print sources for them to evaluate. Some “good” sources might include: academic journals, recently-published books by credible sources, and magazines like *Scientific American*, *Science* magazine, etc. “Bad” sources might include: obviously outdated books or encyclopedias, tabloid papers, or “advertorials” sponsored by corporations.

### FOLLOW-UP ASSIGNMENT

### Uncover a Mystery from History!

Students research a “mystery from history” of their choosing. They write a short essay discussing their findings, presenting their own conclusions, and defending the sources that they used to support that conclusion. They also discuss their reasoning for rejecting a certain source or theory in the essay.

### EXTENSIONS

#### BASIC SOURCE INTERROGATION

#### Relevant Sources

For younger students, omit the more complex discussion questions above. This age group can focus on determining if sources are recent, credited to an author, and on-topic.

## **BUILDING AN ARGUMENT**

### **Writing a Thesis**

Discuss the structure of a research paper with the students, focusing on writing and defending a thesis.

## **SUMMARY SKILLS**

### **Mystery from History**

Give the students a half hour to study a “mystery from history” of their choosing, online or at the library. Have them write a one-paragraph summary of their findings to present at the end of class.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*This background information is for teachers. Modify and communicate this information to the students as necessary.*

Today's students have unprecedented access to information, but it can be difficult for them to discern which sources are acceptable for academic research. The line of questioning described in the lesson plan is a good start, but students will likely need additional guidance on where to find appropriate sources.

Libraries are excellent sources of printed material like books and periodicals, but they also house two other underutilized resources: online databases and librarians. Many libraries subscribe to a variety of online databases that provide access to academic journals and periodicals that the library does not carry in print. This way is often the best method of accessing a great deal of specific information on esoteric topics. Because these databases can be a little daunting, however, encourage students to ask a librarian for assistance. Librarians are highly trained researchers who can help guide students to the appropriate resources.

Most students will want to begin their research online, which is not necessarily bad. A general online search or even a trip to Wikipedia can help students obtain some very broad information to start with, but it is crucial to emphasize the limitations of crowd-sourced material. Encourage students to seek out research from credited writers who have a vested interest in the accuracy of their claims. Students should avoid information from personal websites or blogs and even major online news sources should be very carefully considered. For example, a news story about a scientific development might be covered on a general news site, but an academic journal or reputable science periodical is likely to have more detailed and accurate information on the topic.

### RESOURCES

#### **“The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual”**

*The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, the collection that this story appears in, is in the public domain and is available in a variety of formats via Project Gutenberg, Google Books, and many other websites.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/>

<http://books.google.com/books>

Audio recordings of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* are available via LibriVox.

<http://librivox.org/>

### **The Discovery of King Richard III**

The Smithsonian website has two excellent video clips on the subject: one detailing the search for the gravesite and another showing how modern forensics helped identify the king's remains.

<http://www.smithsonianchannel.com/sc/web/show/3381029/kings-skeleton-the-richard-iii-revealed#the-search-begins-for-a-slain-king>

### **The Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus**

A well-known “hoax” site dedicating to “saving” the Pacific Northwest tree octopus, a nonexistent animal. This site is a fun example of how a source that appears reputable may not be.

<http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/>

### **Riddle**

Who was he?  
A notable Boar.

Who was his foe?  
A red Rose.

What did he take?  
Edward's seat.

Who told his tale?  
Avon's son.

Where did he rest?  
Beneath Jaguars and Vauxhalls.

### **Key**

The riddle refers to the Richard III, the last English king from the House of York. The term “Boar” refers to Richard's personal badge, which was a white boar. The “red Rose” is Henry VII, the first Tudor monarch, who defeated Richard at the Battle of Bosworth. Richard's nephew, Edward V, was declared illegitimate and Richard took the throne, which ultimately precipitated the Battle of Bosworth. “Avon's son” refers to William Shakespeare, who wrote the play *Richard III*. Richard's remains were discovered beneath at parking lot in the English city of Leicester (Jaguar and Vauxhall are British automobile brands.)