

SHERLOCK HOLMES

On the Trail of a Mystery

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

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once called “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” his favorite Sherlock Holmes story. Indeed, it is a classic and enduring example of the mystery form. In this activity, students will learn about mystery vocabulary and structure, learn to identify those elements in the story, and craft a persuasive response that predicts their own solution to the mystery.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Learn “mystery” vocabulary and identify those elements in “The Adventure of the Speckled Band”
- Cite evidence from the text to support analysis
- Generate a persuasive essay that uses textual elements to support a claim or argument

TIME REQUIRED

Pre-Lesson:
Reading Assignment

Lesson Plan:
~60 minutes

Post-Lesson:
Writing Assignment

PROGRAM FORMAT

Segment

On the Trail of a Mystery
Make Your Case!
Revealing the Solution

Format

Group Discussion and Activity
Individual Writing Activity
Video Clip and Discussion

Time

30 min
20 min
10 min

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.1	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.1	Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3	Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.3	Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3	Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

SUPPLIES

Supplies	Amount	Notes
“The Adventure of the Speckled Band” Short Story Part I	1 per student	See the Resources section.
“The Adventure of the Speckled Band” Short Story Part II	1	Teacher may read aloud.
“Sherlock Holmes and the Speckled Band” video or video clip (optional)	1	
“On the Trail of a Mystery” Resource	1 or 1 per student	See the Resources section.

ADVANCE PREPARATION

Previous Class:

- The students may read the first section of “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” or, if time permits, the students may read it in class following the discussion of mystery elements.

Notes and Hints:

- The students will read **the first three-quarters** of the story and write a persuasive paragraph that predicts the story’s solution. The recommended “cut-off” point for Part I is after the sentence: “Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left in darkness.” It is recommended that the instructor omit the last section of the story completely, so the students are not tempted to “spoil” the story for themselves.
- If the students are reading the first section of the story for homework, encourage them not to seek out the rest of the story online or elsewhere. If a student has read the story previously, he or she may choose to posit an “alternate ending” to the story for his or her persuasive response.

INTRODUCTION

5 minutes

Notes

Suggested script is shaded.

Important points or questions are in bold.

Suggested answers are in italics.

By now, you are likely familiar with mysteries. Was anyone familiar with Sherlock Holmes before you read this story? You might have seen modern movies or television shows based on Sherlock Holmes. Even if you are not familiar with Sherlock Holmes, maybe you have read the 39 Clues series or *The Westing Game*? Can you name some mysteries?

Students list books, movies, video or computer games, etc.

So we are very familiar with mystery as a form, even if we do not realize it. What does a mystery need to have? What are the common ingredients in a mystery?

Students will likely list clues, a crime, a detective, etc.

Write down the list on the board as the students generate ideas. Most students will have an intuitive knowledge of a mystery and may provide information that overlaps with the “On the Trail of a Mystery” resource.

GROUP DISCUSSION
AND ACTIVITY

On the Trail of a Mystery

25 minutes

1. Review the “On the Trail of a Mystery” resource with students.

We have listed many of these terms already, but here we present an overview of how a mystery is usually structured. This structure is not necessarily how every mystery is arranged, but many of them follow this formula.

Exposition

In this section, we meet some of the **characters** (usually the main character, the **detective**), and the **setting** of the story is established. When you think of setting, think about “setting the table.” When you set a table, you lay out everything you need before you sit down to a meal. A story’s setting should provide all the background you need before the action of the story begins. A well-written story will continue developing characters

and providing rich descriptions and context throughout, but establishing a clear and vivid setting at the beginning is crucial to the reader's understanding of everything that follows.

Ask the class to consider:

- What kind of information do we need before the “action” of the story begins?
- Do the students prefer a lot of exposition, or do they like when a story gets right to the “action?” What is different about the two reading experiences?

Rising Action

The introduction of the central problem or **conflict** sets off a chain of events and actions that constitute the rising action of the story. The detective might encounter a **victim**, a **witness**, or a **suspect** and discover **clues**. This series of discoveries and events will build logically and, if the writer is skilled, the reader will feel tension, excitement, and a drive to discover the solution to the mystery.

Ask the class to consider:

- Does the writer need to provide all the clues necessary for the reader to solve the mystery?
- How does a writer create the feeling of tension and excitement in a story?
- What purpose does a **red herring** serve in the story?

Climax

In a mystery, the **climax** could be the high point of physical action in the story or simply the moment when the detective discovers a pivotal clue. Students may differ in their opinion of what the climax of a story is, but a useful characterization of the term is “the point at which an irrevocable change is made.”

2. Have the students go through their copies of Section I of “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” and identify as many vocabulary terms as possible (for example, the dummy pull, the bowl of milk, and the ventilator can all be identified as *clues*; Dr. Roylott is a *suspect*.)
3. The class comes together to share their responses.

INDIVIDUAL
ACTIVITY

Make Your Case!

20 minutes

We have studied the elements of the mystery, but we still have not covered the most crucial part: the solution! The solution to the crime is usually revealed in the story's resolution.

Resolution

The resolution ties up the loose ends in the story. Often the detective will describe his or her process of **deduction**, reveal the full **solution** to the mystery, and prove that a suspect is now, undoubtedly, the **perpetrator**. Often the fates of the victim and perpetrator are revealed.

Ask the class to consider:

- What do we mean when we say a resolution is “satisfying”? What elements does a resolution need to satisfy us, particularly in a mystery story?

I will reveal Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's solution to the mystery at the end of class, but for now, I would like to hear your solutions! Consider the clues you have identified in the story. What do you think that they mean? Is Dr. Roylott the murderer? Could someone or something else be responsible?

1. Have the students write a short persuasive response (1-2 paragraphs) predicting the outcome of the story. Encourage the students to utilize mystery vocabulary.
2. If time permits, have the students share their responses and predictions.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The Solution is Revealed!

10 minutes

1. When the students have finished their responses, play the video clip from “Sherlock Holmes and the Speckled Band” (see the Resources section for more information.) In the clip, Sherlock and Watson encounter the snake and learn the fate of Dr. Roylott. On the train ride home, Holmes describes his process of deduction. If the video is unavailable, read the end of the story aloud to the students.

2. Find out if anyone guessed the solution correctly!

Ask the class to consider:

- Was the solution “guessable”?
- Did Conan Doyle give all the information necessary to solve the case?
- Was the resolution a satisfying one?
- What do the students think about the fate of Dr. Roylott?

FOLLOW-UP ASSIGNMENT

Make Your Case! Part II

If the students were unable to finish their persuasive paragraphs in class, they may complete them for homework and learn the story’s solution in the next class.

For an additional assignment, have the students write a short persuasive response defending either Dr. Roylott or Sherlock Holmes. Were Holmes’ methods justifiable? Was Dr. Roylott a victim?

EXTENSIONS

THE MANY FACES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Comparing Characters

Have the students generate a list of the characteristics of Holmes and Watson. Ask the students to seek out other representations of Holmes and Watson (in other books, movies, TV shows, cartoons, comics, etc.) and compare the characters. How have the characters changed? What has remained the same?

THE EVOLUTION OF MYSTERY

Mystery Form

Have the students read Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and a contemporary mystery story of their choosing. How has the form changed? What has remained the same?

WRITING EXPOSITION

Telling vs. Showing

Ask students to experiment with different ways of writing exposition: through dialogue, emails or letters, descriptive

language, summary, etc. Discuss the distinction between “telling” and “showing.”

WRITE A MYSTERY

Exploring Structure

Ask the students to write their own short mysteries, employing mystery terms and structure. Or, have the students write a mystery that inverts the structure.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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

Sherlock Holmes is unquestionably the world's most famous literary detective, but he was not the first. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe, who created what is widely considered the first modern detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Poe's story introduces many familiar features of the detective story: a brilliant, eccentric hero, an admiring assistant, a complex crime. Poe's detective, C. Auguste Dupin, also employs logical, methodical thinking (what Poe referred to as "ratiocination") to solve the case. Dupin would appear in two other Poe stories, but the first of these, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," is notable for its originality and its establishment of what would eventually become detective story tropes.

Conan Doyle, a great admirer of Poe's, built on this framework. Sherlock Holmes is a champion of logical thought, but also a man of science. Holmes' firm belief in the problem-solving power of science was typical of the Victorian era, which saw great scientific and technological advancement. Holmes was based on Dr. Joseph Bell, a professor of medicine at Edinburgh University, where Conan Doyle studied. Bell dazzled the students there with his casual observational prowess, a habit Conan Doyle borrowed for Holmes.

Conan Doyle also believed that the reader should be given all the relevant information necessary to understand the solution—there should be no clues that the reader is unaware of or uncanny coincidences. Holmes always reveals the logical process of deduction that led to the mystery's solution, another use of figurative language that is well-observed in modern detective fiction.

RESOURCES

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band"

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, the collection that this story appears in, is in the public domain and is available in a variety of formats via the Project Gutenberg or Google Books websites. The Edgar Allan Poe story referenced in the Background Information section ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue") is also available there.

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

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

Audio recordings of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” are available via LibriVox.

<http://librivox.org/>

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes Series: “The Speckled Band”

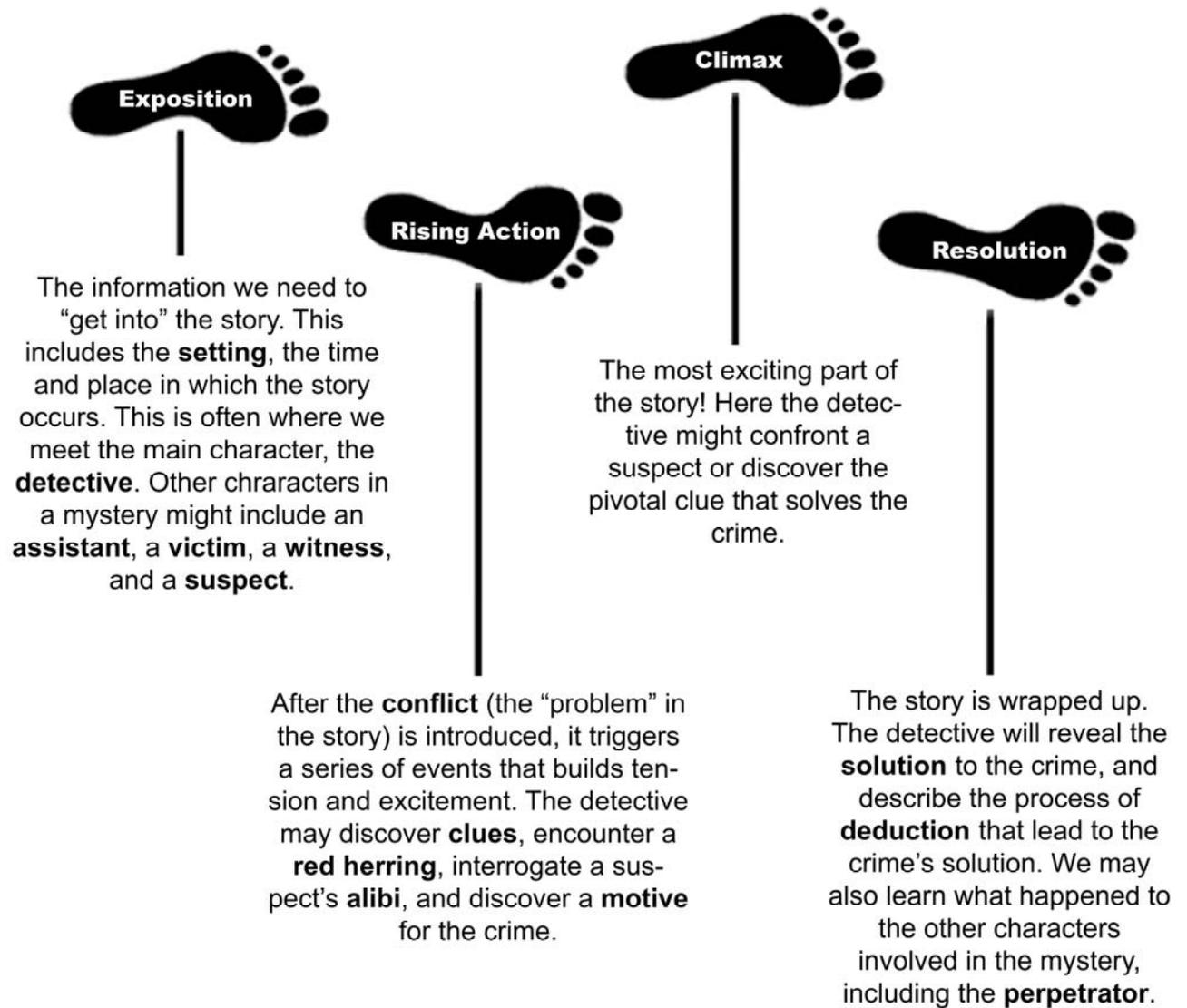
This 1984 episode of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* TV series stars Jeremy Brett (one of the iconic portrayals of Holmes). The series is available on DVD and the individual episode can be purchased on iTunes and Amazon. A clip of the final scene can be found on YouTube.

Mystery Timeline

This Mystery.net article follows the trajectory of the modern mystery story, from Edgar Allan Poe to Hawaii 5-O and beyond. The site is also a rich resource for other information on the mystery form.

<http://www.mysterynet.com/timeline/history-of-mystery/>

On the Trail of Mystery! Resource



GLOSSARY

Alibi	A reason why a suspect could not have committed a crime.
Character	The characters interacting in a narrative.
Climax	The most exciting and pivotal part of the story, in which a major change occurs.
Clue	A piece of potential evidence of a crime.
Conflict	The “problem” in the story. This event or issue causes the events of the story to happen.
Deduction	The process of using reasoning to arrive at a conclusion.
Detective	Often the main character in a mystery. A detective, often with the help of an assistant, investigates and tries to solve a crime.
Exposition	The background information in a story. In this part of the story, the setting is established and some characters are introduced.
Motive	The reason a person might have committed a crime.
Perpetrator	A person who <i>did</i> commit a crime.
Red Herring	A piece of potential evidence that suggests an incorrect solution to the crime.
Resolution	The end of the story, in which the “problem” is solved.
Rising Action	The series of events caused by the conflict.
Setting	The time and place in which a story occurs.
Solution	The answer to a problem.
Suspect	A person who <i>may</i> have committed a crime.
Victim	A person who was negatively affected by a crime.
Witness	A person who saw a crime take place.