



A Scandal in Bohemia

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



About the author

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was one of the most popular fiction writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was born into an Irish Catholic family, on 22 May 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. He 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. 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.

He joined the Society for Psychical Research and for nearly thirty 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. Conan Doyle rather resented the success of his Sherlock Holmes books, feeling that they overshadowed his more important historical and scientific books.

For more details see the Introduction.

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 six 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 that goes 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.

A Scandal in Bohemia

The King of Bohemia comes to London to visit Sherlock Holmes in disguise. He fears that his marriage to the King of Scandinavia's daughter is in danger because of Irene Adler. Adler, his former girlfriend, has a photo of them which he worries may cause a scandal. The King of Bohemia urgently needs Sherlock Holmes to scheme a plan to find the picture so that it can be destroyed. Disguised as a priest, Holmes succeeds in finding out where the picture is hidden, but before he can get hold of it, Adler flees the country with her new husband. She sends Holmes a letter telling him how she saw through his scheme, but promises never to use the picture. No one ever beat Sherlock Holmes but Irene Adler.

The Red-Headed League

Ezekiah Hopkins is the red-haired American leader of a unique League in London for only red-headed men above the age of twenty-one. Jabez Wilson, a shop owner in Coburg Square, starts working for the League in the mornings, leaving his assistant Mr Spaulding, who spends long hours in the underground room developing pictures, in charge of the shop. Mr Wilson works for the League for some time but one day he is shocked to find that the League has been mysteriously closed. Mr Wilson tells Holmes about the League, who realises it was merely an excuse invented by Mr Spaulding to make Mr Wilson leave his shop. Spaulding is really John Clay, a criminal, and he spent the time digging a hole towards the City Bank to steal thirty thousand gold pieces from the bank. Clay gets to the bank and discovers only Holmes and men from Scotland Yard.

The Boscombe Lake Mystery

The Turners and the McCarthys live in Mr Turner's farms by Boscombe Lake. Miss Turner and young McCarthy are in love but Mr Turner is against their marriage. One day Mr McCarthy is found dead and his own son is the first suspect. Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson travel there to solve the mystery. Holmes discovers the killer is Mr Turner, who has just a month to live. Holmes makes him sign a letter confessing his crime and promises him that if young McCarthy is freed, Miss Turner will never know what he did. The letter explains how McCarthy



A Scandal in Bohemia

met Turner in Australia, when they were both young, and witnessed Turner's stealing gold, killing men and escaping to England. McCarthy followed Turner and blackmailed him by telling him that if his daughter did not marry his son he would reveal his past. Turner finally loses his mind and kills McCarthy. Holmes tells the police and young McCarthy is set free. Miss Turner never learns the true story about her father.

The Blue Diamond

Mr Peterson asks Sherlock Holmes for help telling him that a chicken and a hat, with the name 'Mr Baker' written on it, are to be given to a Mrs Henry Baker. Holmes is to find the woman but discovers that Lady Morcar's famous 'blue diamond' is inside the chicken. Holmes knows about the missing ring and how a repairman, John Horner, was blamed for the theft. Yet, the chicken evidences something else, so he places an advertisement in the newspaper searching for Mr Henry Baker. Baker eventually shows up but can only provide the name of the man he bought the chicken from. Holmes and Watson talk to many men involved in the purchase of the chicken until he interrogates Mr Ryder, who finally confesses to having stolen the blue diamond and framed innocent John Horner.

The Single Man

Sherlock Holmes is to help the titled but penniless Lord Simon to find Miss Hatty Doran, his newly-wedded, well-off missing bride. Holmes finds out that a dancer who used to date Lord Simon tried to stop the wedding, but failed, and that Miss Doran disappeared after seeing a mysterious man at the church. Miss Doran's clothes appear inside the lake and everything suggests murder. Holmes finds a note written on a hotel bill signed by a F.H.M., Frank H. Moulton, and this solves the enigma. Holmes finds the missing bride and the mysterious man and learns that they were secretly married, against her father's will. Soon after their wedding, Mr Moulton went to New Mexico in search of gold and was reported dead. Miss Doran ended up marrying Lord Simon to please her father, but saw her 'late husband' alive on her wedding day and decided to run away with him.

The Copper Beeches

Miss Violet Hunter is a jobless teacher who used to be paid four pounds a month. She is offered a new position at one hundred and twenty pounds a year by Mr Rucastle, to move to his house, 'The Copper Beaches', teach his

son, wear a blue dress which belonged to his daughter now living in America, and cut her hair short. Miss Hunter initially turns down the offer but she reconsiders it, and asks Holmes for advice. Miss Hunter starts working for the Rucastles and finds her tasks odd. She has to read by the window in Miss Rucastle's dress and wave away a male passerby. She also discovers a secret room in the attic and senses that someone is locked up inside. Holmes and Watson go to 'The Copper Beeches' and find that Mr Rucastle actually hired Miss Hunter to impersonate his own daughter, who was locked in the attic, and to send Mr Fowler, her suitor, away to prevent their marriage and keep the money his daughter's late mother had left her.

Background and themes

When Sherlock Holmes was 'born' in 1887, Victorian society was in a state of unease as new ideas questioned traditional beliefs. The Industrial Revolution had brought about the rapid development of industry, railways, commerce and engineering. Along with this came revolutionary scientific theories (like Darwin's theory of evolution), which shocked many people. Many wealthy Victorian families also felt threatened by the rise of the new class of rich factory owners who often exploited their workers.

Tales of mystery, where social problems were rarely confronted, grew in popularity during the Victorian age. 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.

Although the crimes in these short stories are all different, they are connected by several themes. The theme of marital and family issues, and in some cases, the marital disputes even hinge on disagreements between a child and their parents. Blackmail and theft are also common themes to a few stories. Yet all stories illustrate the loss of moral values and social ethics to self-interest and enrichment.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Discuss: Favourite private detectives

Tell students to write down the names of their favourite detectives in film and literature and to think of their characteristics. Then tell ask them to decide which the most effective traits are.



A Scandal in Bohemia

Introduction

While reading

2 Discuss and write: A special writer

Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair of students one fact about Arthur Conan Doyle from the Introduction to the book. 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.

A Scandal in Bohemia

While reading

3 Predict: A Mysterious Man

Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions after reading page 1: *Why does the visitor wear a mask? Who could s/he be? Why does s/he visit Holmes?*

4 Role play: Have students work in pairs and dramatise this: *You are Miss Adler and Mr Holmes, dressed as a priest. The house appears to be on fire. What do you say? What do you do?*

After reading

5 Write: The Other Side of Truth

Have the students imagine they are Irene writing in her diary. Guide them with these instructions: *You are Irene. Write a) how you felt when you learnt that the King was going to get married; b) how you fell in love with Norton; c) why you decided to keep the picture and letters.*

The Red-Headed League

While reading

6 Discuss: An Important Clue

Ask your students to read page 23 and to discuss the following: *Why does Holmes want to talk to the man? What do you think Holmes is thinking? How can he solve the mystery? Can you imagine what he will do?*

7 Role play: An Inspector at Work

Guide your students with these instructions after they read page 26: *You are Holmes. You have caught John Clay. Ask him as many questions as possible.*

After reading

8 Discuss: A Victim?

Put students into small groups and ask them to discuss the following question: *Do you feel sorry for Mr Wilson? Why? Why not?*

The Boscombe Lake Mystery

While reading

9 Write: A Catchy Headline

Teach the word *headline*. Ask students to look at the newspaper story on pages 33 and 34 of the book and write a headline for the story.

After reading

10 Write: A Special Diary

Ask students to do the following writing activity: *After you read the story, write Mr Turner's feelings and thoughts.*

The Blue Diamond

While reading

11 Predict: A Chicken with a Surprise Inside

Ask students to discuss this in groups after reading page 43: *Why does Peterson visit Holmes? What is the mystery of the chicken? What can it have inside?* After a few minutes, have students read page 44 and compare the content with their answers.

After reading

12 Guess: Who's who?

Tell students to work in pairs. Guide their work with the following instructions: Student A: *You are one of the people in the story. Holmes will visit you, but don't tell him who you are.* Student B: *You are Holmes. Ask questions and find out who the other student is.*

The Single Man

While reading

13 Role play: A Troubled Woman

Tell students to work in groups. They should read up to page 60 and work on the following: *You are Lord Simon, Flora and Lord Simon's friends on page 60. Act out the part in which they try to stop Flora from talking to Hatty.*

After reading

14 Discuss: A True Love?

Tell students to discuss the following: *Do you think Hatty Doran had good reasons to do what she did? What would you do for love?*

The Copper Beeches

While reading

15 Write: A Woman in the Upstairs Room

Ask student to work in pairs and write the following: *You are Miss Rucastle locked up in the attic. Write down a) how you feel; b) why you are kept there; c) how you feel about Mr Fowler; d) what you plan to do.*

After reading

16 Discuss:

Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss the following questions: *Imagine that someone offers you a job, but wants you to change the way you look. Will you take the job? Why? Why not?*

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.