

Elementary, my dear Watson!

from *A Study in Scarlet* Arthur Conan Doyle, 1887

WARM UP

- 1 What do you know about Sherlock Holmes?

Sherlock Holmes is the most famous detective in fiction. He first appears in A Study in Scarlet (1887). The character became popular when The Strand Magazine started publishing a series of short stories called The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes in 1891. All the stories are narrated by Holmes's friend and biographer, Dr John H. Watson. A Study in Scarlet introduces the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson and tells us how they met. Watson is a military doctor who is now back at home in London because he was injured during the war in Afghanistan. He doesn't have much money, nor friends or relatives. Sherlock Holmes identifies himself as a detective. In the text Sherlock Holmes explains to Dr Watson the method he uses to solve mysterious crimes.



“Observation with me is second nature. You appeared to be surprised when I told you, on our first meeting, that you had come from Afghanistan.”

“You were told, no doubt.”

5 “Nothing of the sort. I knew you came from Afghanistan. From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps. There were such steps, however. The train of reasoning ran, ‘Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military man. Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.’ The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished.”

20 “It is simple enough as you explain it,” I said, smiling.

(Chapter II)

Glossary

a train of (thoughts) a series of events or actions that are related

swiftly quickly and immediately

undergo experience/suffer

hardship something that makes your life difficult or unpleasant


haggard someone who has lines on their face and dark marks around their eyes, especially because they are ill, worried, or tired

stiff rigid

wounded injured by a weapon such as a gun or knife

astonished very surprised

► DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

2  **1.183** The following are the steps of Sherlock Holmes's method to solve mysteries. Listen and read the text and put them in the right order.

- a formulate your theories
- b analyse what you discover
- c arrive at a solution
- d observe everything and collect facts

3 Mark the statements as true (T), false (F) or doesn't say (DS), if not mentioned in the text.

- 1 Dr Watson is a soldier.
- 2 Dr Watson lives in London.
- 3 Dr Watson is married to an Afghan woman.
- 4 Dr Watson has just come back from a tropical holiday.
- 5 Dr Watson has been injured.
- 6 Dr Watson looks ill and tired.

4 **PERSONAL RESPONSE** Answer the following questions.

- Do you like detective stories?
- Do you know any other famous detective?
- Who is your favourite detective?



HERCULE POIROT

DR HOUSE

JACQUES CLOUSEAU

► WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

5 Read the following quotes about Holmes's methods of investigation. Then tick the sentence (a-c) which best corresponds to his method.

"From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps."

"You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear."

"It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."

- a Sherlock Holmes solves the greatest mysteries by intuition only, without reference to visual clues.
- b Sherlock Holmes solves the greatest mysteries by using observation and applying logic to what he sees.
- c Sherlock Holmes believes you can solve mysteries even if you do not have all the necessary information.

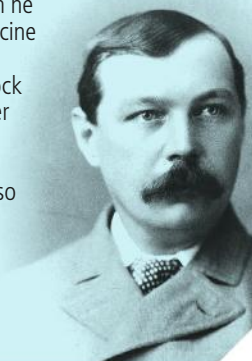


Let's meet the author

Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)

Doyle is most famous as the inventor of Sherlock Holmes, but he also had a career as a journalist and public figure. He was born in Edinburgh into a prosperous family. After graduating from Edinburgh University he worked as a doctor on a whaling boat and on a steamer. When he settled in Portsmouth he divided his time between medicine and writing.

Apart from stories with Sherlock Holmes, Doyle wrote a number of other novels, including *The Lost World* and various non-fiction works. Conan Doyle also twice ran unsuccessfully for parliament. In later life he became very interested in spiritualism.



▶ THE CHARACTERS' GALLERY

In *A Study in Scarlet* Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created one of the most famous relationships in literature. Holmes is rational, sensible and has an intellectual superiority over all the other characters in the stories. Dr Watson brings humanity to Holmes: without Watson's sympathetic telling, Holmes would appear cold, inaccessible and unpleasant. Holmes and Watson complement each other.

6 Here is a list of information about Holmes and Watson. Put it in the right column.

- 1 He is famous for his pipe and his cap.
- 2 He is a doctor and worked as a surgeon in London before the war.
- 3 He is quiet and humble.
- 4 He has always lived at 221b Baker Street, London.
- 5 He uses a small magnifying glass that he can easily carry around.
- 6 He served in the British Army in Afghanistan.
- 7 He avoids women, because he thinks their influence is a distraction to his investigation.
- 8 He is a very ordinary man.



DR JOHN
H. WATSON

SHERLOCK
HOLMES

DR WATSON	SHERLOCK HOLMES
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.....
.....
.....
.....

Elementary, my dear Watson!

"Elementary, my dear Watson!" is one of those phrases that everybody knows. The character of Sherlock Holmes says it when explaining the deductions he makes to his assistant, Dr Watson. In fact the line doesn't appear in any of the books by Conan Doyle! It was only introduced later in the Sherlock Holmes films.

Sherlock Holmes and his famous deerstalker

As soon as the Sherlock stories appeared, the famous image of Holmes wearing a deerstalker hat started to circulate. Holmes wore a deerstalker only when he went to the country to investigate mysteries at country houses and in small rural villages, but most people think of the detective as always wearing the hat when off to investigate a case. What is certain is that Conan Doyle never described Holmes as wearing one specifically. The deerstalker cap helped Sherlock Holmes to become instantly recognisable in popular culture and today it is still the symbol of a detective.



221b Baker Street the official home of Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson lived at 221b Baker Street between 1881-1904, according to the stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The house, which is now a museum, is protected by the government due to its "special architectural and historical interest".

Lit &
POP



► THE LANGUAGE OF BOOKS

7 Read the text about the most important elements of a mystery story. Fill it in with the missing words.

missing • detective • crime • suspects
clues • witnesses

DETECTIVE STORY

The most important elements in a detective story are:

Characters

The main characters are:

- Detective: a character trying to solve the mystery.
- ¹.....: characters believed to have possibly committed the crime.
- ².....: characters who saw the crime being committed.

Setting

This is the location where the mystery takes place.

Plot

When reading a mystery, the story usually includes one of the following:

- A problem
- An event that cannot be explained
- A secret
- Something that is lost or ³.....
- A ⁴..... that has been committed

Clues

These are hints that can help the reader and the ⁵..... solve the mystery. They can be things people say or do, or objects that are found that provide important information.

Red herrings

These are distractions or false ⁶..... that may lead the reader or the detective off track. Red herrings often make it more difficult to solve a mystery.

► THE BOOK AND ITS TIME

The Sherlock Holmes stories are all set in London during the Victorian Age and are all great little representations of Victorian England. The name comes from Queen Victoria's reign which lasted from 1837 to 1901. It was a time of progress and optimism but also a time of great contrasts. London grew from one to six million inhabitants in only one century. This caused social problems such as poverty, homelessness and crime. Sherlock Holmes lived in Baker Street in London. He was a man of science who moved around London and used his skills to solve mysterious crimes.

Filmophilia

Sherlock Holmes is the most-filmed fictional character. He has appeared in 226 films and has inspired countless TV series. At the same time many fictional detectives have drawn upon Sherlock Holmes as an influence. Most TV and film adaptations are rarely faithful to the original and often use a completely new storyline or change almost everything of the characters.



Elementary

USA 2012

A series for CBS with a modern day Holmes in New York City. Dr Watson is played by Asian-American actress Lucy Liu.

Sherlock

UK 2010

A British television crime drama, in which Mr Holmes is a private detective in today's London. The first episode of the series "A Study in Pink" is based on *A Study in Scarlet*: it tells the story of how Holmes and Watson met, their entering a flatshare in Baker Street in London, and then their investigation into a series of suicides.

8 Surf the Net and look for the episode "A Study in Pink" from the British television crime drama *Sherlock*. Watch the scene when Holmes and Watson first meet. How different is Mr Holmes from the original?

