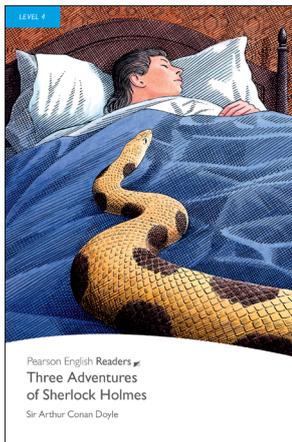


Three Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



About the author

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh in 1859. He studied medicine in Edinburgh and practised until 1890, when he became a full-time writer. He first introduced the character of Sherlock Holmes to the public in 1888 in *A Study in Scarlet*. He published stories involving Holmes in *The Strand* magazine, and Holmes quickly became famous. He published many Holmes stories in the magazine but wanted to be considered as a serious writer, so he decided to kill off Holmes. The last Sherlock Holmes story ends with Holmes apparently falling to his death with his enemy, Moriarty. But Conan Doyle was offered large amounts of money to write more stories, which he did. Arthur Conan Doyle died in 1930, but his hero is still very much alive today.

Summary

The Speckled Band

What is the speckled band? A headscarf? A group of gypsies? Whatever it is, it killed Helen's twin sister Julia just before her marriage. Now Helen herself, also on the verge of marriage, fears for her life. She calls in Sherlock Holmes, who discovers that her stepfather, Dr Roylott, recently of India, enjoys his modest income from the will of his late wife only until each of the daughters marries. He therefore had a strong motive for Julia's death and may also be plotting against Helen too. But how could he have killed Julia? She died in a locked and barred bedroom, with no apparent signs of violence. The only peculiar facts are the bell rope, which goes nowhere, the fixing of the bed beneath it and a ventilator which only connects with another room. Oh, and the low whistle and sound of metal that was heard at the time of Julia's death.

Holmes and Watson lie in wait in Helen's room and suddenly, there it is – the speckled band – in fact, a deadly snake, slithering down the bell rope onto the bed. Holmes beats it with his stick and it returns from whence it came, through the ventilator into Dr Roylott's room, where it fatally bites its master.

The Five Orange Pips

Why should Elias Openshaw, an ex-planter from the southern states of America, now living in Horsham, England, be afraid of five orange pips which arrive one day in an envelope marked KKK? Whatever the reason, his fears are justified as, within ten weeks, he is dead following an apparent accident. His brother, Joseph, inherits the house and eventually also receives five orange pips. This time it is only four days before he dies, again apparently accidentally. Now it is John Openshaw's turn to inherit the house and, it seems, the danger, as he too receives a letter with five orange pips. He goes to Sherlock Holmes but it is too late. On his way home, he also meets with an 'accident'.

Holmes does some research and discovers that KKK means Ku Klux Klan, a secret organisation against black people in the southern United States. He also realises that each letter with the pips was posted from a seaport, and the distance from the port to Horsham equates to the time before the letter and the death.

Therefore, the sender was on board ship, and only one ship from America matches the dates at each seaport. Holmes sends a letter to the ship, warning the murderers that he is on their trail, but the ship goes down and a higher authority exacts revenge.

The Crown of Diamonds

Alexander Holder lives with his son, Arthur, his niece, Mary, and a small team of servants including Lucy Parr. He is a respected banker with a reasonably happy home life, but then tragedy strikes and, in his own words, he stands to lose his good name, his diamonds and his son, all in one night. Mr Holder has lent money to an important personage and as security, he has been given a crown of diamonds. He takes the crown home and locks it away in a cupboard in his dressing room. Then he ensures that all doors and windows of his house are locked, but, that same night, he wakes to discover his son holding the damaged crown. A part of the crown, with three diamonds in it, is missing, and when accused of stealing the missing diamonds, Arthur refuses to explain his actions.

Three Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Mr Holder turns him over to the police and goes to Sherlock Holmes for help.

Holmes feels that Arthur must be innocent. Why steal the crown, hide part of it then return to be discovered? And how could he break off the piece anyway? His suspicions fall on Holder's other relative, Mary, and he is able to prove that she stole the crown and passed it out of the window to her lover. Arthur realised what was happening and gave chase to the fleeing man. He managed to grab the crown and, in the struggle, a piece broke off. He was returning the crown to its rightful place when he was discovered. The thief presumably picked up the broken piece and sold it because Holmes is able to track it down and buy it back. But in the meantime, Mary has disappeared, probably to join her lover, the thief. Knowing the man for what he truly is, Holmes thinks this will be sufficient punishment for Mary.

Background and themes

Nowadays, in the English-speaking world at least, the detective story is one of the most popular forms of fiction, appearing as novels, plays and films. Yet the detective story is a relatively recent invention. In the 1840s, the American writer, Edgar Allen Poe, wrote three stories, including *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which are considered to be the predecessors of the detective story. There are, however, earlier fictional instances of the use of deductive processes, which lie at the heart of the detective story. The genre appeared in England with the detective in the Dickens novel *Bleak House* and more completely in 1868 with the mystery *The Moonstone* by Dickens's friend, Wilkie Collins. But in all these cases the detective was a policeman, a professional.

Conan Doyle's detective, created in the 1880s, was an amateur with, apparently, an unlimited stock of knowledge about all manner of arcane subjects, such as tobaccos of the world and undetectable South American poisons. The Holmes stories also set the pattern of the witless sidekick – an extremely useful literary device – as it always gives someone who, like the reader in most cases, has not a clue what is going on and needs to be led like a child through the process of deduction.

The genre came to be known as whodunit (who has done it) because all the effort of the detective, and the readers, is to discover the perpetrator. But the television character

Columbo turned even that on its head, with cases in which the viewer knows who has done it from the first scene, but becomes enthralled in the manner in which the shambling detective traps the murderer.

Discussion activities

The Speckled Band

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask students if they have read or seen any Sherlock Holmes stories. If any have, ask them what they can remember of the plot and the way that Holmes solves the crime.
- Guess:** Get students to speculate about the title of this short story. Ask them to check the meaning of the words 'speckled' and 'band' in the dictionary if necessary.

While reading

- Pair work:** (page 4) The twin sisters did not have a happy life after their mother died. Ask students to find the reasons why.
- Discuss:** (page 7) Get students to discuss what the police and the doctors didn't find after Julia's death?
- Discuss:** (page 8) Helen's situation now is similar to Julia's at the time of her death. Ask students to discuss the following: What are the similarities?
- Role play:** (page 12) Get students to act out the conversation between Sherlock Holmes and Helen when he tells her about her stepfather's visit to his place.
- Write:** Holmes finds a number of clues (on pages 13–17). Get students to complete his notes:
 - shutters that no-one could ...
 - building work which is ...
 - bell ropes which ...
 - ventilators which ...
 - a large iron box with a ... on top of it
 - a small dog lead with the end ...
 - a bed that is ..., near the bell rope and under the ventilator

After reading

- Discuss:** Ask students to imagine that Dr Roylott did not die from the snake bite but was arrested and interviewed by the police. Put them in pairs to role play the conversation between Roylott and the policeman, in which Roylott confesses everything.
- Group work:** Put students into groups to write a short 'locked room' story. A person dies in a room that is locked and barred. There are no signs of violence. How was the murder committed? Each group gives clues to the other students and they have to try to solve the murder.

Three Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

The Five Orange Pips

Before reading

- 10 Research:** Divide students into four groups. Tell them that these phrases appear in the story. Ask them to find information about the following:
- the KKK (Ku Klux Klan)
 - the American Civil War
 - planters in Florida
 - Jackson's Army
- Then they present a summary of their findings to the rest of the class.

While reading

- 11 Role play:** (after reading page 28) John Openshaw tells Holmes that the police listened to his story with a smile. Ask students to role play the conversation between John and a police detective after he received the letter from London.
- 12 Discuss:** (page 35) Holmes says he will find the murderers, and then the police can have them. Ask students to discuss the following: Where should he start his work? Why? What information must he find?

After reading

- 13 Write:** Ask students to work in groups and make up a story about how Elias Openshaw came to have the list of KKK members. They must write a paragraph about the events.
- 14 Group work:** Put students into groups and ask them to work out how John Openshaw was tricked into going down beside the river.

The Crown of Diamonds

Before reading

- 15 Guess:** Ask students to read the title of the story and the title of part on page 38. In groups, they discuss what this case might be about. Then have a class vote for the most interesting case.

While reading

- 16 Pair work:** (after reading page 49) Holmes assumes the man who brings the vegetables has a wooden leg. How did he work this out? Ask students to answer the question in pairs.

- 17 Discuss:** (After the end of part I on page 51) Ask students to discuss the following questions: What is Holmes thinking? What questions does he need to answer?
- 18 Role play:** (page 59) Holmes says he bought the diamonds back after some discussion. Ask students in pairs to role play the conversation between Holmes and the man who had the diamonds.

After reading

- 19 Group work:** Ask students to work in groups of four and act out the theft of the crown, the fight, the return of the damaged crown and the waking of Alexander. Each group must contain the following:
- Alexander Holder
 - Arthur
 - Mary
 - Sir George Burnwell
- 20 Role play:** The crown is damaged but the broken piece has been recovered. Put students into pairs to role play the conversation between Alexander Holder and the famous person, when he returns the £50,000 and gets his crown back. Does Alexander explain exactly what happened? How does the famous person react?

Extra activities

- 21 Discuss:** Ask students to discuss these questions: Which of the three stories in this book has meant the most interesting case for Holmes? Which did you enjoy the most? Why?
- 22 Discuss:** Point out to students that many Holmes stories have the basic problem as the title of the story e.g. *The Speckled Band* and *The Five Orange Pips*. Put students into groups to think of a strange title for a story, then give their title to another group, who must make up a story around the title.
- 23 Discuss:** Ask students in pairs to discuss the following question: What must a successful detective be like? What must he do to solve the extraordinary cases that people bring him? Then they share their opinions with the rest of the class.