



Sherlock Holmes Short Stories

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



About the author

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) was born in Edinburgh and qualified as a doctor after studying medicine at Edinburgh University. He went into medical practice at Southsea on the south coast but began writing stories to supplement his income. In 1887, he published the first long Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*. Four years later, when his short stories about the detective began to appear regularly in *Strand* magazine, he gave up his career as a doctor, though he later received a knighthood for organising medical services during the Boer War in Africa (1899–1902).

Conan Doyle looked like a stronger, taller version of the narrator of the Holmes stories, Dr Watson, and his values were similar too – those of public schoolboys in the Victorian era (1832–1901). He was brave, good at sport and chivalrous towards women. Doyle was fascinated by brave people in history and he preferred his historical novels to Sherlock Holmes. Consequently, he announced Holmes's death in a story in 1893 and did not write about him again for several years. But in 1901, he had the idea for his most famous Holmes story, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and Holmes's popularity with the public caused Doyle to bring him back to life for a further series of adventures.

Summary

The six Sherlock Holmes stories in this volume contain examples of the contrasting kinds of stories that made the detective famous: those where pure logic solves an apparently insoluble problem, and those of action, where Holmes and his friend, Dr Watson, arrive just in time to save innocent victims from villains.

How could a respectable businessman be seen at the window of an opium den and his clothes found there with no trace of the man himself? Surely the tramp with the twisted lip in the room must have murdered him. Or why should a millionaire in America have left a fortune to three people with the unusual surname of Garrideb? Or will Holmes and Watson be in time to discover the whereabouts of the beautiful Lady Frances Carfax before she is murdered by criminals?

The Man with the Twisted Lip

Mrs Saint Clair sees her husband (Neville) at the window of a place that attracts opium addicts. Neville seems to wave at her nervously and then disappears from view. Mrs Saint Clair gets the police to search the building for her husband. In the room where she saw him, they only find his clothes. A crippled beggar who is in the room is arrested. Holmes tries to find the missing man.

Conclusion: Holmes discovers that the beggar is actually the missing husband in disguise. He has made his money by begging but doesn't want his family to know that. He changed in and out of his disguise each day at that room in the opium den.

The Engineer's Thumb

Victor Hatherley, an engineer in need of money, is hired by a strange looking man (Captain Lysander Stark) who needs to fix a machine. Hatherley is offered a large sum of money to help him. However, Hatherley must not tell anyone about the job and he must travel by train at night to a location outside London.

After Hatherley meets Stark at the train station, they take an hour-long journey together. (Hatherley is not able to see where they are going because the carriage windows are coloured glass.)

When they finally arrive at their destination, a woman warns Hatherley to leave immediately. Hatherley ignores the warning because he wants to get paid for his work. Stark and another man (Mr Ferguson) take Hatherley to a room to look at the machine. When Stark believes Hatherley is checking out what the machine is used for (probably something illegal), he tries to kill him. The woman helps Hatherley escape but he loses his thumb when Stark strikes him with an axe. After waking from his unconscious state, Hatherley finds himself back near the train station.



Sherlock Holmes Short Stories

Conclusion: Holmes decides that the machine is used to press money and that an unconscious Hatherley was probably carried away from danger by the woman and Ferguson. The train station was near the house but Hatherley had been tricked into thinking it was far away. The house burned down in a fire that night, probably because of a lamp that Hatherley left by the machine. The three from the house get away with boxes of forged coins.

The Patient

Dr Trevelyan set up a private medical practice in his home, with the help of a stranger, Mr Blessington. In exchange, Blessington stayed at the house and received a percentage of the doctor's earnings. Trevelyan came to Holmes when Blessington became crazy with fear. His anxiety started when he heard about a recent robbery. (Blessington kept all his money in a metal box in his room because he didn't trust banks.)

Trevelyan started treating a patient who introduced himself as a Russian lord. He came with his son. Blessington was out for a walk when the man was being examined. When Blessington returned, he saw footprints in his room. Someone had been in there but nothing had been taken.

Holmes asked Blessington who the men were and why they were his enemies. When Blessington said he didn't know them, Holmes told him he needed to tell the truth and left. The next day, Trevelyan told Holmes that Blessington had hung himself.

Conclusion: Holmes figured out that 15 years before, the two men and Blessington had been part of a group of four robbers. Blessington had helped the police and was set free, while one of the men was hanged. The other two (who had disguised themselves as the patient and son) had gone to prison. Once free, they came to punish Blessington. It seemed that they put Blessington on trial, found him guilty, and hanged him.

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

Watson is sent to Switzerland to look for Lady Frances Carfax, an unmarried woman travelling alone but who has not been heard from for weeks. While she is not rich, she always travels with her unique (and valuable) jewellery. She had been seen talking with a wild-looking Englishman in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Then in Baden-Baden, Germany, she had met a man (Dr Schlessinger) and his wife. The doctor, a religious man, had become ill and Lady Frances had helped the doctor's wife take care of him. She had left with both of them for England. The hotel manager told Watson that a strange Englishman (likely the one she had seen in Lausanne) had asked about her.

Watson talks with Lady Frances's maid (Marie Devine) in Montpellier. Devine had always been loyal to Lady Frances. However, she had left Lady Frances in Baden-Baden when Lady Frances accused her of stealing from her. Devine told Watson that she thought Lady Frances was trying to escape from the strange Englishman. Just then, she sees him walking past them. Watson tries to talk to the Englishman but when Watson mentions Lady Frances's name, the man gets in a fight with him. Watson is saved by Holmes (who is there in disguise) and explains to him that the Englishman is actually an old friend of Lady Frances's (Philip Green) who had been in South Africa earning enough money so he could marry her.

They discover that the doctor who Lady Frances is travelling with is actually 'Peters the Priest', a man known for robbing lonely women with the help of a woman who pretends to be his wife. Holmes, Watson and Green find the location of the evil couple in London by tracking the sale of some old jewellery through a pawn shop.

Conclusion: They find that the evil man and woman have arranged for Lady Frances to be buried in an extra deep coffin along with an elderly woman who has died. They break open the coffin and find Lady Frances who is still alive.

The Three Garridebs

An old man (Nathan Garrideb), who spends most of his days at home with his collection of things, contacts Holmes. Nathan has heard from an American lawyer (John Garrideb) that he could become rich. That lawyer meets with Holmes and explains that a rich American man named Alexander Hamilton Garrideb had died and left a strange condition in his will. Alexander said that if three adult males could be found with the unusual name of Garrideb, then these three men would then receive his property (worth five million dollars each).

The lawyer says he has found a third Garrideb (Howard) in England and asks Nathan to travel by train to meet this man and explain the situation. While Nathan does not want to leave home, Holmes persuades him to go.



Sherlock Holmes Short Stories

Conclusion: Holmes and Watson wait in the old man's house, and after some time the lawyer breaks in. He pushes away a table, lifts up the floor covering, and climbs into a hole underneath. They are able to stop the lawyer but not before he shoots Watson in the leg. Holmes discovers a press for printing money in the hole. The lawyer was actually 'Killer Evans'. Years before, he had shot the man who owned the printing press in the house now occupied by Nathan. Evans served time in prison and had waited for his chance to access the house to obtain the printing press. But first, he had to get Nathan out of the house.

Wisteria House

Scott Eccles comes to Holmes to relate the previous night's strange events at the house of a new friend named Garcia. Eccles then finds out that the police want to question him about the death of Garcia.

Eccles describes how he had been invited to spend a few days at Garcia's house with Garcia and his two servants. At dinner, he saw how Garcia was distracted, especially after receiving a note. Eccles went to bed but woke up to hear Garcia at his door. Garcia noted the time (one o'clock) and said that he thought Eccles had rung a bell asking for assistance. The next morning, Eccles discovered there was no one in the house.

Meanwhile, the police find Garcia's body in a nearby field and determine he was killed before a heavy rainfall at one o'clock. The police arrest Garcia's cook in connection with the crime.

Holmes believes that Garcia invited Eccles to his house as a witness who could swear Garcia was home at one o'clock. In trying to decipher the note Garcia read, Holmes believes that a large house nearby was involved in the murder. He focuses his attention on High Gable, a house occupied by foreigners, including an evil man named Mr Henderson.

Meanwhile, Miss Burnet, an Englishwoman who taught the children in High Gable and lived there, has not been seen since Garcia's murder. While Holmes and Watson plan to climb into Burnet's room at the house, they hear that she has run away from Henderson and the others, who were escaping on a train.

Conclusion: Holmes discovers that the police arrested the cook to make Henderson feel safe and give the police a chance to save Miss Burnet.

The police say that Henderson was an evil Central American ruler named Juan Murillo who had escaped from his country after an uprising. His enemies, including Garcia, were seeking revenge for his crimes. Miss Burnet's husband had been the London representative of the San Pedro government and Murillo had ordered his death. Miss Burnet had gone into the house as a teacher and had sent Garcia the note that let him know where Murillo would be that night. However, the plot was discovered. Garcia was killed and Miss Burnet was kept prisoner until her escape at the train station.

Background and themes

Sherlock Holmes is by far the most famous fictional detective. His name has become part of the English language, and the stories still appeal to readers today even though the social background of London has changed completely.

Conan Doyle based Holmes on one of his teachers at Edinburgh University, a man called Bell, who had the ability to guess his patients' background from observing their every minute detail. This kind of analysis and explanation continually astonishes Watson and delights readers. In contrast to Watson, who is a conventional ex-public schoolboy, Conan Doyle also gave Holmes characteristics that would have appeared rather exotic. He is a confirmed bachelor, he plays the violin, he takes drugs and he despises authority. Part of his attraction is that he is a rebel, but a rebel on the side of justice, and consequently he has a freedom of thought and action which the average policeman doesn't have. But he is also able to defend himself physically and is a master of disguise so that even Watson fails to recognise him.

The contrast between Holmes and Watson is vital to the success of the stories. Watson asks all the questions the reader wants to ask, and when Holmes impatiently explains what to him is obvious, Watson is acting on our behalf. Apart from that, if Holmes told the stories he would sound arrogant, but instead of that we are full of admiration for him because we see him through Watson's eyes.

Though there are two kinds of Sherlock Holmes stories represented in this selection, the themes are similar in both cases. The villains are usually professional criminals, often hiding behind false names, who aim to make money by robbery, fraud, or by forgery. The puzzling plots depend on the idea that there is always a logical explanation



Sherlock Holmes Short Stories

for what seems strange. The other stories are more conventional tales of action.

The social background accurately reflects London a hundred years ago. This was a society where forty per cent of the population were servants. People respected gentlemen like Holmes and Watson, and hurried to obey their orders. The police belonged to a lower social class and were poorly thought of because of inefficiency and corruption. This is why almost all fictional detectives until the 1920s were amateurs. Another feature, in contrast to today, is that trains always seem to run on time, carriages were always on hand when needed, and Holmes and Watson never seemed delayed by traffic.

The villains in the stories of action tend to come from abroad. The German villain in *The Engineer's Thumb* reflects the emergence of Germany as the main threat to the British Empire. When good and bad characters both have a colonial background (Green and Peters in *The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax*), we are reminded that young men at that time often went to 'the colonies' to make their fortune.

The enduring appeal of the Sherlock Holmes stories is partly due to television. They are ideally suited to short episodes where the characters are already known and the background can easily be recreated on the screen. The stories also depend on dialogue and adaptation to dramatic form. But above all, there is the fact that internationally Holmes has become the perfect example of the private detective.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Have the students seen films or videos about Sherlock Holmes? What do they know about him? Have them look at the cover of the book. What do they think is happening? How does it make them feel?
- Group work:** These stories take place about a hundred years ago in London, England. In groups, have students discuss what might be different about life then and now. For example, the different types of transportation and the ways the police might take care of investigations.

Introduction

After reading

- Read carefully:** Have the students read about Conan Doyle in the *Introduction* (pages viii to ix). Have students work in pairs and fill out a chart about the author.

Author's name: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
 Date and place of birth:
 Family:
 Education:
 Medical work:
 First printed stories:
 Introduction of Sherlock Holmes:
 First marriage:
 Second marriage:
 Children:
 Full-time writing:
 Other writing:
 Political life:
 Spiritual interests:
 Death:

The Man with the Twisted Lip

Before reading

- Discuss:** This story involves a person who begs for money on the street. Have students discuss how it would feel to beg for money. What could be the reasons that cause people to beg?

After reading

- Pair work:** Have students choose five words that they feel best describe Neville Saint Clair. Have them discuss their choices with the class.
- Group work:** In small groups, have students list the reasons why Holmes initially believes Neville Saint Clair has been murdered. Then list how he reaches the correct solution to the story.
- Role play:** Have students imagine the conversation Neville would have with his wife after his release from jail. Student A is Neville. What would you say to your wife about your situation? Student B is Isa, the wife. What would you ask your husband about his disappearance? How would you respond to his story?

The Engineer's Thumb

Before reading

- Guess:** The picture on the cover of the book is from this story. Have students look at the name of this story (*The Engineer's Thumb*) and try to imagine what the story might be about.

After reading

- Discuss:** Have students think about Mr Hatherley's situation. If they were him, would they have accepted the job, even though they had to meet the employer late at night at a faraway place and keep everything secret? Why or why not? What could they have done to keep safe?
- Write:** Have students imagine that they are Elise and they are riding away in the cart with Stark and Ferguson at the end of the story. *How do you feel? What will you do? Will you stay with the men? Why or why not? Write your thoughts as a journal entry.*



Sherlock Holmes Short Stories

- 11 Art work:** In pairs, ask students to design a 'Wanted' poster that the police could use to try to find and arrest Captain Stark. Have them draw a picture of Stark and write a brief description. State his crime and other important information, including a brief description of his travelling companions.

The Patient

Before reading

- 12 Discuss:** In *The Patient*, a doctor has his private medical practice in his home. Have students discuss the possible benefits and problems involved with having patients visit one's home.

After reading

- 13 Pair work:** In pairs, have students list what Holmes discovers in the room that helps him explain how Blessington died.
- 14 Write:** Have students read what happened to the Worthingdon Bank robbers on page 52. Then have them imagine that they are newspaper reporters. Write a story for their newspaper about the death of these four men. What can the readers learn from the story of these robbers?
- 15 Discuss:** Have students discuss what they would have done with the money if they were Blessington. How could they keep safe from the other bank robbers and still enjoy their life?
- 16 Role play:** In groups of three, have students role play Blessington and the two men who pretend to be a patient and his son. Students A and B are the two men who pretended to be father and son. Tell Blessington how you found him, why you wanted to find him and what you intend to do. Student C is Blessington. Try to explain your situation and get the men to forgive you.

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

Before reading

- 17 Guess:** Have students look at the title of this story. What will it be about? Who might be the main characters?

After reading

- 18 Role play:** Have students imagine the conversation Mr Green and Lady Frances might have at the end of the story. Student A is Philip Green. Tell Lady Frances where you have been, what you have done, and your plans for the future. Student B is Lady Frances. Talk about what you have done in the last few years. What are your plans?
- 19 Discuss:** On page 55, Holmes tells Watson that the London police 'would feel lonely if I went abroad'. In the stories, the police are always polite to Holmes and depend on him to solve their cases. Have students discuss how they think the police in their country today would react if a private detective behaved like Holmes.

The Three Garridebs

Before reading

- 20 Guess:** Have students look at the title of this story. What could it be about? Have them share their ideas in class.

After reading

- 21 Group work:** Have students make a list of the steps Holmes took to solve this case.
- 22 Write:** Have students imagine how Holmes would feel if Watson were seriously injured in the shooting. Have them pretend they are Holmes. *Write a letter to Watson in the hospital, thanking him for his help and friendship.*
- 23 Role play:** Have students imagine the first conversation Nathan Garrideb would have with a friend after hearing the news about the will from the American lawyer. Student A is Nathan Garrideb. *What would you tell your friend about this news? How would you feel?* Student B is Nathan's friend. *How would you respond to the news? What advice would you give Nathan?*
- 24 Discuss:** Have students imagine that they suddenly have five million dollars. What would they do with the money?

Wisteria House

Before reading

- 25 Guess:** Have students look at the title of this story. Where might this house be located? What type of people might live here? What might happen? Share ideas as a class.

After reading

- 26 Role play:** In pairs, have students act out the conversations between Baynes and Sherlock Holmes on pages 100–101 and 106–107. Encourage them to take on the roles of the characters and use expressive voices. Circulate around the room and find two students to perform the dialogues for the class.
- 27 Write:** Have students imagine how Eccles might feel to be involved in this case. What might Eccles write in a letter to a friend about his role in this adventure? Have students write the letter.
- 28 Role play:** In pairs, have students imagine how Henderson (Murillo) and Lucas (Lopez) might feel after they find Miss Burnet writing a note to Garcia. (See page 108.) Have them act out the conversation between Henderson and Lucas. What should they do about Miss Burnet?
- 29 Write:** Have students imagine how Mrs Durando (Miss Burnet) might feel after the death of Murillo and Lopez in Madrid. Have students write a *Letter to the Editor* from Mrs Durando that expresses her feelings about their death.

Vocabulary activities

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