

## Teacher's notes

# Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Boscombe Pool

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



## SUMMARY

'The Mystery of Boscombe Pool' is one of over fifty stories that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote about his most famous character, the detective Sherlock Holmes. It was the sixth Holmes story and first appeared, as 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery', in *Strand*, a London magazine, in 1891. The following year it appeared in the first collection of Holmes stories, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

The story takes the great detective Sherlock Holmes to the west of England, where he and his friend Doctor Watson investigate a murder case. The police are certain that eighteen-year-old James McCarthy has killed his father, Charles. Holmes is not so sure. With his powers of reasoning and observation, he realizes that the case is much deeper than anyone thinks. But can even he save James McCarthy's life?

## ABOUT SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) was one of the most popular fiction writers in the English-speaking world. He was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, of an artistic Irish Catholic family, attended strict Catholic schools, and went on to train as a doctor at Edinburgh University. It was there that he published his first short story, before serving for seven months in the Arctic as a student doctor on a ship. His life was always to be a mixture of literature and adventure.

After 1882, Conan Doyle published many stories while working as a doctor in Portsmouth, England. However, he did not invent Sherlock Holmes until he wrote *A Study in Scarlet*, his first full-length book, in 1887. *A Study in Scarlet* did not attract a large readership but its reception was good enough for Conan Doyle to publish a second Holmes novel, *The Sign of the Four* (1889). This time the story was published in a magazine. Conan Doyle started writing short stories for magazine publication, and it was this that really made Sherlock Holmes - and Conan Doyle - famous. Soon Conan Doyle gave up work as a doctor and became a professional writer.

Conan Doyle now began to publish other stories of adventure, and invented many other characters. Conan Doyle tried several times to stop writing Holmes stories, to

free himself for new ideas - but each time he tried the public begged him to bring the great detective back.

Conan Doyle was an active man all his life, and was never content simply to write. In 1900 he went to southern Africa to help the British forces in the Boer War (1899-1902). He had a strong belief in justice and fought for many people who were wrongly convicted of crimes. This and the extraordinary success of his books made him a popular public figure in his time. When the horrific war in Europe started in 1914, he suggested ways of protecting soldiers so that fewer were killed. His own son died after being wounded in the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

Conan Doyle died in Sussex, England, at the age of seventy-one. He is recognized now as one of the greatest story-tellers of his age.

## ABOUT SHERLOCK HOLMES

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did not invent the detective story. However, he created some of the greatest detective stories and certainly, in Holmes himself, created their greatest character. Watson, who narrates all the Holmes stories, describes Holmes as 'the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen'. But Holmes was more than just a great detective - he was a genius, with a mysterious, unusual personality. He played the violin to concert standard, he had strange moods, and he rarely talked about his personal life. All these details, recorded by Watson with such admiration, brought Holmes to life as almost a real person. Soon after the first stories appeared, *Strand's* editors began receiving letters from people who wanted to know if Holmes really existed. The editors were clever enough never to say 'yes' or 'no'. Even now, many people are unsure whether Holmes was a historical person or not. The fact that he was not, but seems to be, shows the greatness of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's skills as a creator of characters.

Conan Doyle's inspiration for Holmes came from many different sources. The works of the French writer, Emile Gaboriau (1835-1873), the true father of the detective novel, were being read in translation in Britain from 1881 onwards. But Conan Doyle, like all detective writers since, also owed a great deal to Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49).

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Conan Doyle also modelled some of Holmes's methods of detection on those of a great scientist, Joseph Bell. Conan Doyle studied medicine under Bell at Edinburgh. Bell used to amaze his students with his ability to tell the occupation of any of his patients from the tiniest observations he made of their appearance.

Sherlock Holmes was 'born' at a time when the tale of mystery was increasing in popularity. In 1860 Wilkie Collins (1824-89) had published one of the first great novels of mystery, suspense and crime, *The Woman in White*, and it was immediately successful. Other leading novelists of the day shared the new enthusiasm for mystery. Many of Charles Dickens's (1812-70) later novels, such as *Bleak House* (1852), *Little Dorrit* (1855) and *Great Expectations* (1861), contain dark secrets at their centre. The late Victorian love of mystery explains some of the enthusiasm with which the Holmes stories were greeted at the time - but it was only part of their success. The stories were popular, and still are popular, because Conan Doyle was a great story-teller, and because Holmes was a fascinating character. Over a century after his first appearance, that fascination remains - and, if anything, has grown. Modern readers have found new interest in the atmosphere of the stories, and Conan Doyle's exact descriptions of the times his detective lived in. Holmes's world was late nineteenth-century England, mostly London. It is a world of gas lighting, fog and horse-drawn carriages.

## Communicative activities

*The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. Further supplementary exercises, covering shorter sections of the book, can be found on the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers, but with the exception of pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.*

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Ask the class whether they have read any Sherlock Holmes books or seen stories about him in films or on TV. If they have, ask them to tell other students in the class as much as they can about him.
- 2 Ask the class what they like about detective stories. Ask them what other famous detectives they know about, for example Hercule Poirot in Agatha Christie books. Which ones do they like best, and why?
- 3 Ask students to work in groups and to discuss differences between detectives like Sherlock Holmes and modern detectives they see on TV. Which do they prefer?

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## Pages 1-16

- 1 Ask students to read pages 9-10 again. Then put them into pairs. One student is the Questioner and the other is James McCarthy. The Questioner can look at his/her book, but James McCarthy cannot. The Questioner

asks questions and James McCarthy tries to answer. They then change roles.

- 2 Write on the board this list of people in the story. Doctor Watson, Charles McCarthy, James McCarthy, John Turner, Miss Turner, Lestrade  
Put students into pairs. One student says one or two words connected with one of the characters, but doesn't say who it is. The other student guesses which character it is. They take turns to describe the person and to guess.

## Pages 17-29

Put students into pairs. Ask them to read the conversation with Alice Turner on pages 13-14 again. Ask them to discuss: What does she say that Sherlock Holmes thinks is important?

Holmes gets a map of Australia. In their pairs, students role-play a conversation between Holmes and Watson after he looks at the map.

## Pages 30-37

Students now know the full story. Put them into pairs. Ask them to look at pages 34 and 35 again and do the following role play:

They are John Turner and Charles McCarthy. It is a week before the murder. They talk about James and Alice, and have an argument.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

In groups, ask students to discuss:

- 1 Did you like this book? Was it exciting? Was it easy or difficult to guess who the murderer was? Would you like to read more Sherlock Holmes stories?
- 2 Are there any parts of the story that you found hard to believe? List things: for example, John Turner smoked a cigar when he was hiding behind the tree.
- 3 When in the story did you know that John Turner was the murderer. How?

## Glossary

*It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)*

## Pages 1-16

**alone** (adv, adj) not with any other people

**carriage** (n) before there were cars, people travelled in carriages; they were pulled by horses

**case** (n) a question that is answered in a court of law

**guilty** (adj) when somebody breaks the law, they are guilty

**innocent** (adj) when somebody doesn't break the law, they are innocent

**mine** (n) a deep hole in the ground, from which people dig out gold, tin, etc

**quarrel** (n/v) when two or more people disagree and speak angrily about it

**servant** (n) a person who works for someone in their house

**telegram** (n) a message sent by radio or electric lines

**wound** (n) a part of your body that has been cut or hurt

## Pages 17-29

**mark** (n) a place which is there because somebody has done something there; for example, a footmark is where somebody has walked and left a mark on the ground

**path** (n) a narrow area through woods or fields for people to walk on

**ash** (n) if you burn a cigarette it turns to grey ash

**cigar** (n) a thick brown stick which people smoke

**magnifying glass** (n) a piece of glass which people look through and which makes things look bigger than they are

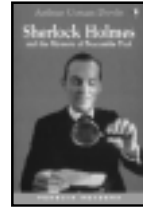


## Student's activities

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Student can do these activities alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

## Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Boscombe Pool



### Activities before reading the book

Read the introduction and answer the following questions about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

- (a) Who from his own life did Conan Doyle use in his stories for
  - (i) Sherlock Holmes?
  - (ii) Dr Watson?
- (b) When did he write his first Sherlock Holmes book?
- (c) How did he start to have real success with Sherlock Holmes?
- (d) Why did he decide to 'kill' Sherlock Holmes?
- (e) Why did he 'bring Sherlock Holmes back to life'?

### Activities while reading the book

PAGES 1 - 16

**Pages 1-6 (to 'His case will come up in a few weeks' time.')**

- 1 Who is telling the story?
- 2 (i) Make notes about John Turner, Charles McCarthy and the murder.

#### The Case of the Boscombe Pool Murder

John Turner lives in (a) ..... Valley.

Daughter's age: about (b) .....

Turner made his money in (country):

(c) .....

Number of servants: (d) .....

Charles McCarthy lives in (e) .....Valley.

Name of farm: (f) .....

Owner of farm: (g) .....

Son's name: (h) .....

Son's age: (i) .....

Number of servants: (j) .....

The two men first met in (country):

(k) .....

#### The Murder

Day and date of murder: (l) .....

Probable time of murder: (m) .....

Probable place: (n) .....

Who said he found the body: (o) .....

The murderer possibly killed the man with the wooden part of a (p).....

They found James McCarthy's (q) ..... by the dead man.

(ii) Compare your answers in groups or pairs. See if you agree.

- 3 What happened on the day of the murder? These sentences are mixed up. Number them (1-9), so that they tell the story of the murder.
  - (a) Patience Moran ran away and told her mother.
  - (b) William Crowder saw James McCarthy. James was going the same way as his father, with a gun.
  - (c) Charles McCarthy went to Ross with his servant.
  - (d) James McCarthy ran to the Morans' house and told them his father was dead.
  - (e) Charles McCarthy told his servant he had a meeting at 3 pm.
  - (f) Patience Moran saw Charles and James McCarthy by the lake. They were arguing.
  - (g) Charles McCarthy and his servant drove back to the farm.
  - (h) An old woman and William Crowder saw Charles McCarthy. He was walking alone.
  - (i) Charles McCarthy left his house and walked to Boscombe Pool.

### Pages 6-16 (to bottom of page)

- 1 On pages 8-10 James McCarthy tells his story of his father's death, and what happened before and after it. There is one important difference between his story and the story Holmes told Watson on the train. What is it? Discuss the question with another student, and try to agree.
- 2 At the end of the first part of the book, you know what different people think about James McCarthy.
  - (a) Draw a line between the person's name and the sentence that describes what they think.
 

Lestrade	is sure that James is innocent.
Sherlock Holmes	thinks James is guilty.
Watson	thinks James is probably innocent.
Miss Turner	at first thought James was guilty, but now thinks he is innocent.
  - (b) Compare your answers in groups or pairs.
- 3 What do you think? Did James kill his father? If so, why did he do it? Why do you think that? If he didn't kill him, who did? Why did he/she do it?

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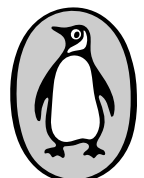
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## Student's activities

PAGES 17 - 29

**Pages 17-20** (to '...every movement had a meaning.')

- Answer these questions using 'so that', 'because' or 'to'.
  - Why can't James McCarthy marry Miss Turner?
  - Why did James McCarthy go to Bristol?
  - Why is James McCarthy a lot happier now?
  - Holmes thinks that Charles McCarthy went to the pool to meet someone else, not his son. Why does he think this?
  - Why does Holmes think Charles McCarthy's friendliness to Turner was unusual?
  - Holmes wants to see a pair of James McCarthy's boots, and the boots that Charles McCarthy was wearing when he died. Why?
- Now who do you think killed Charles McCarthy? Do you have any new ideas?

**Pages 20-26** (to 'I shall be with you again in ten minutes.')

With another student, discuss questions 1 and 2 below. Try to agree. You'll find out all the answers when you read the next few pages.

- On page 24, we read that Holmes 'picked up something small, which looked burned'. What do you think this is?
- Why do you think the stone is interesting to Holmes?

**Pages 26-29**

- What is the connection between Australia and these two things:
  - 'Cooee'?
  - a rat?
- Now what do you think about the murderer? Have you got any new ideas? Who killed Charles McCarthy? Why? Why do you think that?  
Write your ideas or talk with another student.

PAGES 30 - 37

**Pages 30-31** (to '... I shall not use it until I must.')

Match the sentence halves 1-4 to (a)-(d). Then join them with 'if'.

- Sherlock Holmes thinks people will talk
  - John Turner promises to tell the police everything
  - It will break Alice Turner's heart
  - Sherlock Holmes will only use the true story
- she hears that her father is a prisoner.
  - they see him going to John Turner's house.

- he needs it to save James McCarthy's life.
- the case goes against James McCarthy.

**Pages 31-37**

- These sentences are mixed up. Number them (1-14), so that they tell John Turner and Charles McCarthy's story.
  - John Turner's wife died.
  - McCarthy wanted John Turner's daughter to be his son's wife, and asked John Turner.
  - John Turner was working in the gold mines in Australia.
  - John Turner got married.
  - Turner saw Charles McCarthy and his son. They were arguing.
  - During the robbery, Turner decided not to kill McCarthy.
  - McCarthy's murder happened.
  - Turner left the gold mines and became a robber.
  - Turner gave McCarthy money and a house.
  - The Ballarat Boys stopped a carriage which was carrying gold.
  - Turner went back to England.
  - Turner met McCarthy in London.
  - Turner bought the big house at Boscombe.
  - McCarthy followed Turner to the West Country.
- Put 1-5 with (a)-(e), to show that the story has a happy ending.
  - The court decides that James McCarthy...
  - Sherlock Holmes doesn't have to tell...
  - The mystery of Boscombe Pool will...
  - James and Alice will soon...
  - James and Alice will never...
  - know about the past.
  - become married.
  - John Turner's story to the police.
  - did not murder his father.
  - stay a mystery for ever.

**Activities after reading the book**

Think about these questions and see if you agree. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Discuss them with another student or write your thoughts.

- Was John Turner a bad man? Why do you think he was/he wasn't?
- Was Holmes right not to tell the police the true story?

