



Heather Deal, media specialist at Stewart Middle in Douglasville, received a grant to purchase reading materials based on the Sherlock Holmes stories. The books are in English, Spanish and Russian.

COURTESY

By H.M. Cauley - For the AJC

## DOUGLAS COUNTY DOUGLASVILLE

As the media specialist for a Title I middle school, Heather Deal has faced two ongoing challenges: getting kids, especially boys, to read, and finding funds to buy books. She has spent 13 years in the job at Stewart Middle figuring out ways to overcome those odds, and she recently received some help from a literary superhero.

Enter Sherlock Holmes, the master of deduction and observation whose ability to solve the most baffling cases has made him a favorite of readers around the globe.

His presence on Stewart's media center shelves has created a buzz among the 650 students at the Douglasville school because these editions aren't quite the classics author Arthur Conan Doyle imagined. They feature Holmes in graphic novels and spinoffs that are age appropriate and written in English, Spanish and Russian.

Deal bought 50 books with a \$1,000 award from the Beacon Society, an arm of the Baker Street Irregulars, an international organization that promotes all things Sherlockian.

Through its Jan Stauber Grant Program, educators can apply for funds to incorporate Doyle's works into the curriculum or introduce students to the stories.

Deal learned about the grant in her quest to find funding.

"When I transitioned from the classroom to the media center, I was introduced to budgets and how much things cost," she said. "We only get a couple thousand dollars for our books, technology, films, the whole nine yards, and you quickly see how expensive things are, especially graphic novels. But I've found those are what boys would read."

Deal has also learned that many students aren't drawn to the classics. But these updated versions of longtime favorite Holmes stories such as "A Study in Scarlet" give the old stories a twist.

"These books have new covers, and the content is adapted to the genre of graphic novels," she said. "About 85% of my circulation is graphic novels. They're great because if a student struggles with reading, the books can help them because the pictures give context. Kids who would not usually pick up a classic will pick up a graphic novel."

The new books are also offered in Spanish and Russian to support the reading needs of the school's diverse population.

“I want all students to feel included,” Deal said. “We have some Ukrainian immigrants, and I was lucky to find some of these books because there isn’t a whole lot in Russian to choose from.”

Deal said the grant committee was won over by having the books reach across reading levels and languages.

“They liked the idea that we could meet the needs of so many students,” she said.

Deal has given the collection a special place in the media center and added decorations such as Sherlock’s famous hat and pipe. Though not a Holmes fan, Deal practices the same approach in her job that the detective follows in fiction.

“In this job,” she said, “you’ve got to get creative and think outside the box.”

Information about Stewart Middle is online at [www.dcssga.org](http://www.dcssga.org).