

Student Perspectives on Sherlock Holmes

THE 2023 R. JOEL SENTER
MEMORIAL ESSAY
CONTEST PRIZE WINNERS

*Sponsored by
Mrs. Carolyn Senter*

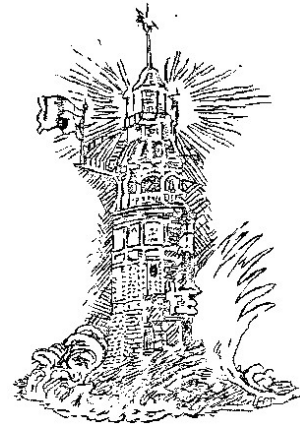
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The Beacon Society, a Scion Society of the Baker Street
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**Compiled by Stephen Mason,
Communications Committee, The Beacon Society**

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With thanks and gratitude to Carolyn Senter and the Joel Senter Memorial Essay Awards Committee:

Debbie Clark

Francine Kitts

Peggy MacFarlane

Tamar Zeffren

Ann Brauer Andriacco -- Chair, Awards Committee

R. Joel Senter

The R. Joel Senter Sr. Memorial Prize was founded by Joel's wife, Carolyn. Carolyn wanted the legacy of her husband to live on in the Sherlockian world after his death.

R(oderick) Joel Senter, Sr. (1930 - 2018) was a man of many interests and correspondingly numerous accomplishments. He played in bands, he performed magic, he taught mnemonics to Air Force personnel, he hosted a Dixieland jazz radio show, he wrote and produced Old Time Radio re-enactments (one of which won an award), and – probably best known – he and his wife, Carolyn, operated the premier Sherlock Holmes mail order catalogue for almost three decades.



Joel was a professor of psychology at the University of Cincinnati for 32 years. For about 10 of those years, he taught enormous-sized classes – from 300 to 800 students. Decades later, those students still remember his clear teaching and his dry wit. Joel also established and headed an Experimental Psychology Laboratory at the university and received numerous grants from government agencies. But he may have been even better known in the field of statistics.

A textbook he wrote, *Analysis of Data*, is something of a classic on the subject. One student, who himself later became a professor, recalled that he hated and feared math until he studied with Joel. “Astonishingly,” he reported, “because of his way of teaching, I loved statistics.”

Throughout all those years of professional achievement, Joel retained a passion for a certain consulting detective that he met in a high school English literature class via “The Adventure of the Red-Headed League.” So, after he accepted an early retirement package from the University in 1988, Joel and Carolyn embarked on the great adventure of the rest of their life together. It involved the founding of Classic Specialties and eventually the *Sherlockian E-Times* newsletter. Classic Specialties was the Amazon.com of the Sherlockian world before there was Amazon – a place where one could buy all manner of Holmes-related books and other products. Many of those products were unique, the creation of Joel's fertile imagination.

The Senters traveled widely as members of several Baker Street Irregulars scion societies around the country. Along with the operation of Classic Specialties, that gave them a network of Sherlockian friends far and wide. Doves of them appeared to offer

condolences and messages of encouragement to Carolyn when Joel unexpectedly passed beyond the Reichenbach in July 2018.



Carolyn decided to give back to this supportive community, and at the same time keep green Joel's memory, by creating the R. Joel Senter Memorial Prize for essays by young readers about Sherlock Holmes. It brings together two worlds that meant so much to R. Joel Senter Sr. – education and the Great Detective.

Joel was fond of quoting a professor of his who said, "He who toots not his own horn, so shall it not be tooted." But, as Carolyn pointed out, "he never followed his own advice and, indeed, even eschewed his own accomplishments."

It is her hope that with this prize Joel's horn shall be un-tooted no more.

SOME WIT AND WISDOM FROM R. JOEL SENTER, SR.

- ❖ *When hearing or reading a statement/proclamation always ask: Who is the speaker and how the heck do they know?*
- ❖ *Always keep in mind when you hear a report such as 40% of some group does something bad or suffers from some disaster that (in this example) 60% didn't. The presentation of this kind of data is meant to shock. Always take note of the inverse.*
- ❖ *Educated does not equal smart.*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, best known today as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, was born on May 22, 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. In addition to his stories about the world's most famous detective, Conan Doyle was a prolific writer whose other works include science fiction stories, historical novels, plays, romances, poetry, non-fiction, and writings on spiritualism.



He originally set out to be a doctor. From 1876 to 1881, he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh. In 1882, Doyle established his own medical practice in the community of Southsea, a suburb of Portsmouth, England.

However, his early medical practice was not very successful, so he wrote fiction to supplement his income. His first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for 1887.

Conan Doyle modeled the character of Holmes in part on one of his former medical school professors, Dr. Joseph Bell. Dr. Bell had the ability to identify a patient's occupation, background, and many other details just by looking at him or her.

The second Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four*, followed in 1890. But Holmes really took off when Conan Doyle hit upon the idea of a series of stories about the same character to run each month in a magazine. This had never been done before.

Conan Doyle pitched the idea to a new publication, *The Strand Magazine*, shortly after it began in 1891. *The Strand* initially published the first twelve Sherlock Holmes, which later appeared in book form as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892). They were an immediate hit with the public. *The Strand* ordered more stories – and then wanted still more.

At the end of the second set of stories, published as *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1893), Holmes's friend, Dr. John H. Watson, related in "The Final Problem" how the detective appeared to have died at the hands of a criminal mastermind, Professor Moriarty. Holmes came back, however, in perhaps his most famous adventure of all – *The Hound of the Baskervilles* that ran in *The Strand* from 1901-1902. Three more books followed. In all, Conan Doyle wrote fifty-six short stories and four novels featuring Sherlock Holmes over a forty-year period ending in 1927. Conan Doyle wrote nearly 200 novels, short stories, poems, historical books and pamphlets, including *The Lost World*

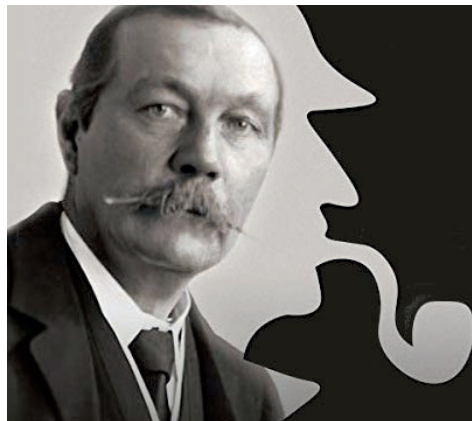
(1912) and *The White Company* (1891). He was knighted by Queen Victoria of England in 1902.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle died of a heart attack in 1930, at age of 71. He is buried in the churchyard at Minstead in the New Forest, Hampshire, England, beneath a tombstone that reads in part:

**STEEL TRUE
BLADE STRAIGHT
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
KNIGHT
PATRIOT, PHYSICIAN, & MAN OF LETTERS**

A detailed biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle can be found on The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Society's website:

<https://www.arthurconandoyle.com/biography.html>



A Bumpy Mystery

Casey Moy, 1st Prize
4th – 6th Grade

Did you know that there is a saying, “Diamonds are a girl’s best friend?” What about for men? Could it be for men too? Today I will be telling you about a story between men and a diamond. I will tell you about a story of a diamond called the Blue Carbuncle, a Christmas goose, a robbery case, and how Sherlock Holmes solved the case. At the end, I will share with you my view on why Sir Arthur Conan Doyle chose to write the story from Dr. Watson’s point of view.

It all started on the second day of Christmas, when Dr. Watson talked about a commissionaire named Peterson who brought Holmes a hat that wasn’t his. Peterson found the hat along with a fat Christmas goose on the street. While Holmes looked for the rightful owner of the hat, Peterson took the goose home and roasted it on the fire. When Peterson was done cooking, he was shocked to see a precious diamond inside the goose’s throat! This diamond is called the Blue Carbuncle. It was stolen earlier from the



Countess of Morcar, from the hotel she was staying at. A 26 year old plumber named John Horner was accused of stealing the countess’ gem. Holmes found a tag with the initial of the owner on the hat, then he figured out what the owner of the hat would be like. Holmes then put up an advertisement in the newspaper and found the owner, Henry Baker. Baker told Holmes where he got the goose, then

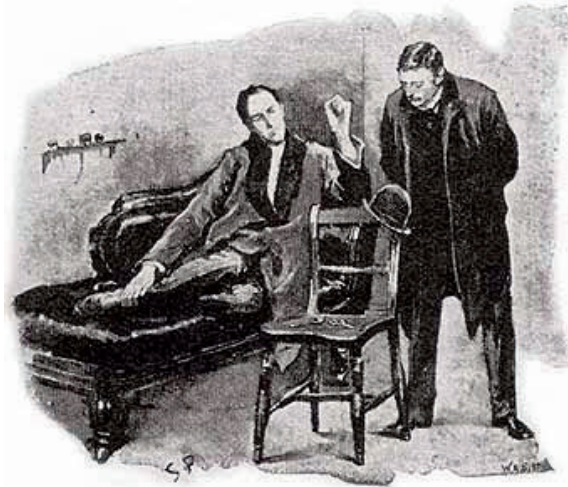
Holmes did a series of investigations and traced the goose back to James Ryder, the upper attendant at the hotel where the Blue Carbuncle was stolen. Ryder confessed that he and the Countess’ maid planned the robbery, and at the end Holmes let Ryder flee England.



The story was told from Dr. Watson's point of view. I think Dr. Watson's view makes the story more fun and interesting. It is interesting when Watson sees something, but gets confused, just like the rest of us. For example, on pages 131-132, Watson sees just a plain hat. I think if I was there I would probably only see a plain old hat too.

However, Holmes told him, "you fail however to reason from what you see." Holmes sees more in a plain hat than any of us average people can see and we can relate to Watson's view better than Holmes' because Holmes can figure everything out in a few seconds while Watson gets confused just like us.

After reading Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Blue Carbuncle*, what do you think about men and diamonds? Are diamonds a man's best friend also? I think that it's not the actual diamonds, but actually greed that are men's best friend, because a lot of men are greedy. Ryder was greedy, but he was caught and learned a valuable lesson. I suggest that we should all work hard for our money instead of being greedy and steal from others. If you ever feel greedy, remember what happened to Ryder.



The Methods of Sherlock Holmes

Eliana Kwon, 2nd Prize
4th – 6th Grade



Have you ever wondered why the London police can't just solve the mysteries themselves? Why does Sherlock Holmes solve them instead? In

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Mystery of the Red-Headed League*, an opening for a job made specifically for red-heads appeared in the newspaper but soon the whole job was dissolved. With Sherlock's quick thinking and comprehension, they were able to prevent an even bigger dilemma. His methods are very different than those of the police and I will be discussing what those methods are.

Sherlock Holmes has a keen eye and notices a lot. He was able to identify five facts about Mr. Jabez Wilson just by looking at him. Another example is when he went to Mr Jabez's shop, he looked at the trousers of Vincent Spaulding, the assistant, and noticed the knees were dirty. While they were leaving, he observed



that the bank was right behind the shop. Later that night, when the case was about to be solved, Sherlock examined the cracks thoroughly. He used his observant eyes to notice important clues.

Sherlock's second method is looking for clues that confirm that his hunches are correct. One example is when Mr. Jabez told Watson and Sherlock that Spaulding was often in the

cellar practicing "photography," but Sherlock suspected there was more to that than what he was being told. When he realized that the bank was right behind the shop, he guessed that Spaulding was digging a tunnel to the bank. So when he beat the

pavement, he was trying to find out if the tunnel was in front or back. Sherlock looked for clues that proved his educated guesses correct.

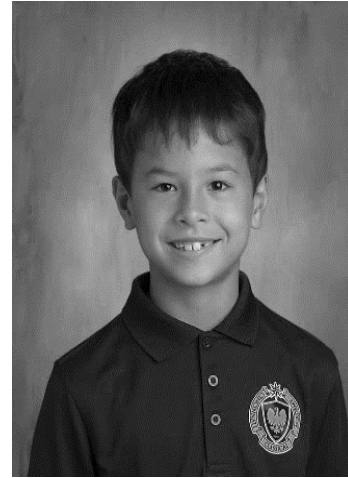
Sherlock Holmes is very prepared yet calm making him very successful. He blocked all of the escape routes and organized a group to go with him to prevent the robbery by planning relentlessly and working late, but he wasn't worried. He was even able to take a break to go to an orchestra and then he was back on the case. He even congratulated the thief, John Clay, because Clay is really smart like himself. Sherlock is ready to take action and calm.

All in all, Sherlock's methods which are observing closely, putting together his guesses with the clues, and being prepared and calm, helped him solve mysteries quicker than the police could. It's not that the police don't solve the mysteries, it's that Sherlock solved them faster so more people come to him with their problems. As Watson said, "...but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes."



Sherlock Holmes and His Methods

Thomas Duh, 3rd Prize
4th – 6th Grade



How would you solve a crime? In *The Red Headed League* Sherlock Holmes solves the crime by using wise methods. First, he carefully observes people. Next, he uses advanced methods. Last, Sherlock Holmes gets answers without arousing suspicion.

Sherlock Holmes carefully examines people. My first example is when he examines Jabez Wilson. Holmes notices a fish tattoo that tells him that Jabez Wilson went to China. My next example is when Holmes carefully listens to Wilson's description of Vincent Spaulding. From this description Holmes learns that Vincent



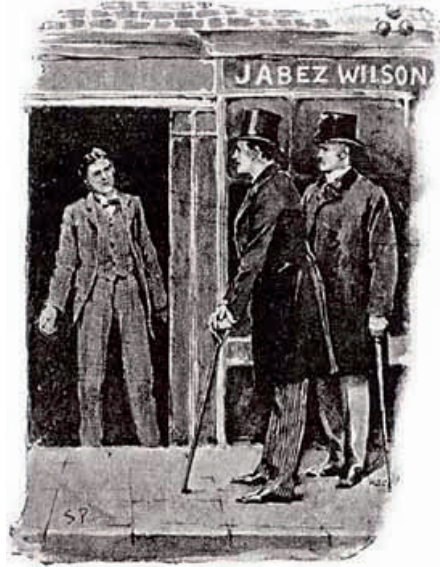
Spaulding has a white dot on his forehead and that Vincent Spaulding goes into the basement to develop film. This makes Holmes suspect that Vincent Spaulding is digging a tunnel. My final example is when Sherlock Holmes examines Vincent Spaulding's knees. Vincent Spaulding's knees were rough and dirty. This helps Holmes confirm that Vincent Spaulding was digging a tunnel.

Sherlock Holmes has very advanced methods. I believe this because Holmes tapped the sidewalk to find out which way Vincent Spaulding was digging on page 70. My second example is when Sherlock Holmes looks at Vincent Spaulding's knees on page 70. This shows that he uses advanced methods because most detectives would not think of using this method. My last and final example is when Sherlock Holmes deciphers exactly when Vincent Spaulding is going to rob the bank by connecting the

dissolvement of the red headed league to Vincent Spaulding.

Sherlock Holmes gets important answers without arousing suspicion. My favorite example is how Sherlock Holmes figures out that Vincent Spaulding is going to rob the bank without even talking to him. In addition, Sherlock Holmes notices that there is a bank directly next door to Jabez Wilson's pawn shop, which Vincent Spaulding works at. This does not arouse suspicion because Sherlock Holmes does not talk to anybody at the bank, so Vincent Spaulding does not think that anybody suspects him to rob the bank.

In conclusion, this proves that Sherlock Holmes uses wise methods. Sherlock Holmes carefully examines people, uses advanced methods, and gets answers without drawing suspicion I hope that you now are also convinced that Sherlock Holmes uses wise methods.



The Abbey Grange

Avery Piatt, 1st Prize
7th – 9th Grade

Sherlock Holmes always seems to savor the moment when he’s finally caught the crook. He lays out his case, along with all of the little details he’s picked up and what exactly he’s deduced from them. The criminal is locked up, the mystery is solved, and the story is at an end. However, in “The Adventure of the Abbey Grange” we see a bit of a twist. Sherlock Holmes does not seem to relish the idea of sending Captain Croker, Sir Eustace Brackenstall’s killer, to the police. Instead, we see justice served by Holmes in a unique way.

At the very start of the story, nothing seems out of the ordinary. In fact, Holmes seems to feel disdain at being called in for this case. He thinks it too straightforward to be of any interest. We’re presented with a seemingly normal story: a man is dead, and his wife claims they were attacked by robbers. It seems clear enough. Yet, after leaving the crime scene, Holmes begins to think that something isn’t quite right. He re-inspects the evidence, and is soon well on the way to discovering the murderer.



All throughout this inspection, there are hints that not all is quite as it seems. For one, Lady Brackenstall was not tied up when the murder was committed. This is proved by the fact that there was blood on the chair. This, paired with her reluctance to tell the truth later, seems to indicate that she was in on the murder of her husband. Yet, she seems to be a genuinely kind, and gentle woman. She was certainly not the person that you would suspect of cold-blooded murder. Holmes begins to see a clearer picture of what occurred, and begins to wonder if the killer was really the villain.

Holmes's conviction about the murderer's intentions was made apparent when he refrained from telling the police to issue a warrant. We can see what he is thinking, when he tells Watson, "...I had rather play tricks with the law of England than with my



own conscience. Let us know a little more before we act." Holmes knows who has committed the murder, but one question holds him back from solving this case. Why was it done?

This question is answered in full when Holmes tracks down Captain Croker. Despite his rough manner, it is easy to see that Captain Croker is a good person. He is loyal, brave, and honest. He acted to defend himself and Lady Brackenstall when he killed Sir Eustace, and stands by what he did.

Holmes realizes that he cannot, in good conscience, turn the man over to the police. He eventually decides to let him go, as long as it doesn't put anyone else in danger. So, Captain Croker leaves a free man, with a whole future ahead of him, and new hope for Mrs. Brackenstall.

Did good really triumph over evil in this story? From a legal standpoint, it did not. A killer walked free, with no consequences for his actions. A man lies dead with no one to pay for it. This would not seem like justice when presented in a courtroom. From a moral perspective, however, the thing is very different. Yes, Captain Croker murdered a man. Yet his reasons were honorable, and he was sorely provoked. From this perspective, the ending of the Sherlock Holmes story is just as it should be: the innocent characters walk free, and the villain receives justice. Lady Brackenstall is freed from an abusive husband, Captain Croker is free to marry her, and Sir Eustace Brackenstall, the real villain in this story, has received a just punishment for his crimes.

The Abbey Grange

Ryan Foley, 2nd Prize
7th – 9th Grade



“Can you see them in your mind’s eye?” Holmes inquires in “The Adventure of Abbey Grange”, referring to the mysterious wine glasses left at the site of the murder. Most people would not pay close enough attention to this detail, but with Holmes’ sharp skill of perception and deduction, this line exemplifies how paramount deduction is and how Holmes has learned to master it. What he tends to do is deduce, or take away, the unnecessary from an investigation, reaching the truth. From multiple readings and being inspired by Sherlock Holmes’ ways of thinking in various ways, like analyzing a situation or issue by looking at all sides before making a judgment, I have learned to deduce my way to find the truth in my own life. In this essay I will show how I use deduction in my life to be a more successful person.



Deduction can be defined as removing the unnecessary facts from an issue or investigation. I use deduction in many areas of my own life, much like Holmes. In addition to deducing my way to find an answer, like Holmes, I look at situations from a fair and unbiased judgment. When hearing issues or opinions in my everyday life, I do not consider any bias I have. When I began high school this year, I wanted to get involved in extracurriculars and joined the high school mock trial team. In mock trial, teams are given a court case that requires you to look at the information from both sides during the trial, because

the participants do not know whether they will be selected as the defense or prosecution. This requires participants to know the case inside and out. Although this makes mock trial much more difficult, the practice of critical thinking here is very

important. During practices, each team must look at the case from the perspective of the prosecutor, the defendant, and the witnesses, and also consider the thoughts of the judge. Our divisive culture of arguing without listening would be much improved if we followed this model. Holmes also looks at the investigation from a fair point of view, and never jumps to conclusions, but instead considers each piece of evidence, examining every nook and cranny of every alleyway. What if Holmes only considered the statement of Lady Brackenstall? What if he had not noticed the beeswing in the wine glasses? What if he did not see the severed cord above the mantelpiece because he had not considered that there was another side to the case?

“I believe that you are a wizard, Mr Holmes. I really do sometimes think that you have powers that are not human,” Inspector Hopkins says to Sherlock Holmes as he reaches the conclusion on the case of Abbey Grange. Indeed this may seem like wizardry to the inexperienced, but it is very possible to look at issues and learn to think critically and deduce your way to the answer. To this day, Sherlock Holmes stories inspire many people to look at situations and issues, big and small, with an unbiased, logical mind.



Lastly, one may consider what impact literature such as Sherlock Holmes has on our modern ways of thinking. These stories inspire readers to analyze issues rationally and practice critical-thinking while still trying to figure out the motive and the villain. Through searching the nook and cranny of every alleyway, we find that there may not be truths that we can deduce as black and white. However, truth is still there, often in plain sight within three glasses of wine or lurking beneath the shadows in the bottom of a frozen lake as we saw in Abbey Grange. Reading and analyzing the works of Sherlock Holmes has inspired me to view the world with a keen eye for detail and to approach each problem with a critical perspective. As you can see, Holmes motivates me to pursue truth through critical thinking, logic, and deduction through all the daily trials in my life.

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Sherlock Holmes: The Act of Reasoning and Deduction

Conan Lamb, 3rd Prize
7th – 9th Grade

Sherlock Holmes is an interesting figure in literature. He seems like some kind of supernatural genius who is only in fiction, but the reality of it is we can all take a page out of his stories and use his ways of solving crimes for ourselves in real life. Many of the things that he does are doable in real life, and perfectly plausible for real world use. So, how can one use deductions like Sherlock Holmes in real life to be successful?

The key to this ability of advanced deduction is not something supernatural, but simply a mindset such as inductive reasoning, a method he uses to go from specific to general reasoning. Always approach situations with an open mind, like Sherlock Holmes does, as evidence may be misleading. Consider all possibilities for the best conclusion and avoid falsely identifying something else.

When you're trying to solve a mystery, be it as big as something Sherlock Holmes would solve or as little as where you set your phone last, you must ask questions. Whether it's asking yourself or others, something such as, "when was the last time I saw this?" is a great way to gain evidence and clues to solve a mystery. As you ask questions, you will start to see connections between everything around you. The more clues you find, the more connections you will start to make until you can finally solve the mystery.

It can sometimes be hard to not have that gut feeling that points us in one direction and that's perfectly fine, but don't let it dictate the whole case. Sherlock has mastered this, as seen in *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, where he initially believes the killer to be the stepfather but must set his feelings aside for facts and evidence. It can be difficult. Gut



feelings have to be set aside sometimes to solve the case. The most important thing while being observant is you must set aside your own ideals and see things through other people's eyes if you're to resolve an issue.

As we look at everything a case has to offer, we see little connection, but the goal is to make everything fit together like a puzzle. The more we solve the more we see, and



once the puzzle is fully built, we can see the full photo or, in our case, the full answer to the mystery. The more we search the more we find, and the more we find the more we can connect. When we look for a connection, we need to make sure we aren't just mashing pieces together like a puzzle piece that looks right but just won't fit. Sometimes you need to turn the piece, meaning think differently, for it to fit.

While asking questions, you must ask the right questions. "Where did I set my phone?" is pretty vague. Instead, try asking "when" you might have set your phone down. If you can answer that, you can trace your steps to where you were at that time and narrow the search down. If you're asking

someone else a question such as "do you remember so and so?" then you can use a similar process to narrow the search down. Creating a timeline of events in your head or on a board can be a great way to narrow down a search and come to a conclusion much faster.

With all of this in mind, it's important to remember that there will always be roadblocks and things that don't add up or make any sense. This is all a part of the mystery and why sharpening our sense of deduction like Sherlock Holmes is a great skill to have. It can come in handy in many situations. Big or small, it's a way to think outside the box. While Sherlock Holmes may be fiction, the ways he solves his cases are not. We can use similar processes in our day-to-day lives and solve things just like him to make the world around us better.

The Women of the Canon

Sabrina Kim, 1st Prize
10th – 12th Grade



In the Sherlock Holmes canon, it's never about the women. This is simply a necessary truth, and a sort of suspension of disbelief, one must accept in reading Doyle's works. Though nearly each story includes a woman in some capacity, a Holmes story has no time to waste, so there is no time to spend on the female characters of the world. Apart, that is, from her dithering soliloquies about the violent state of her marriage and perhaps a tearful cry of gratitude to the detective himself once the case is closed. The invariable dismissal of these women, though largely problematic by today's standards, was in fact quite justified by the amorality of Holmes' profession and the gender norms of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.



One of the most exemplary instances of Holmes' flippancy is in *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton*. However, within this

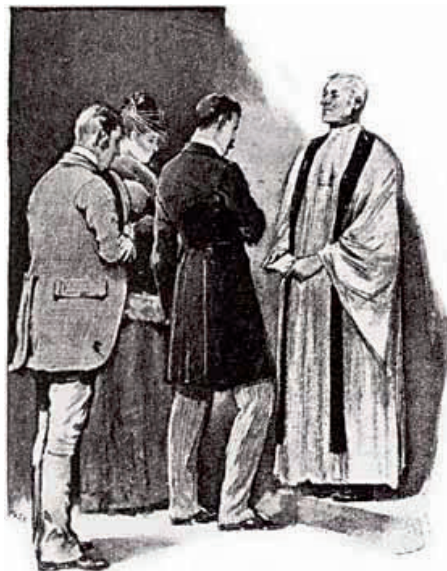
story, his disrespectful actions towards the woman in question - in this case, Milverton's housemaid - are justified by Holmes' place in society. In the story, Holmes courts and becomes engaged to Milverton's maid in order to gain access to Appledore Towers to ultimately dismantle Milverton's empire of blackmail. However, as Watson notes immediately after receiving this information: "Surely you have gone too far?" But Holmes' retort - that this drastic and nearly cruel step is simply a necessity to further his investigation - is far more telling. He is a detective - an extralegal extension of the police. It is his job to solve mysteries and identify culprits, and it is his prerogative to do so with little regard for the bounds

of ethics, norms, or the law. He has no more incentive to be courteous at all times than does anyone else - he is not a superhero nor an officer of the law. Thus, the question of whether or not this action towards the housemaid is "justified" or not is not so much a

matter of whether or not such a thing is moral but rather whether or not that matters at all. Ultimately, Holmes is simply another individual in the city with no affiliation to the crown or the government; the caliber to which they are monitored and expected to adhere to utmost policy has no bearing on him, a private citizen, nor his actions.

But in considering Holmes just another citizen, we must then examine the justification of the average citizen's slights against the female sex. And it is nigh impossible to discuss femininity and the role of women in the Sherlock Holmes canon without discussing *A Scandal in Bohemia*. In this instance, Holmes takes advantage of both Irene Adler's cultural obligations as a woman of society and her instincts as a human to find the King of Bohemia's photograph. First, he disguises himself as a clergyman and feigns injury because he knows that Adler has no choice but to help him

in. It was the responsibility of women in the Victorian Era to maintain the house and home and to play the motherly figure with their families, schools, and communities. As such, she takes him in and tends to his wounds with "grace and kindness." His manipulation continues with Watson as an executor, falsely exclaiming there to be a fire in order for Holmes to ascertain the location of photographs. Holmes later explains that he has "more than once" manipulated the - as he explains - distinctly female instinct to protect prized possessions in case of disaster. "A married woman grabs at her baby; an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box." These actions seem, through a modern lens, cruel and malignant, but it



is critical to imagine the times. Women of all class and kind were not fully autonomous in Victorian England, and had a widely accepted duty to motherhood and soft femininity. Therefore Holmes himself cannot be held accountable for the wrongs against Adler in the story - for neither he, onlookers, or even Adler herself would likely have considered these actions borne of misogyny or prejudice. They are manipulative, of course, but they are no worse than prescribed by the gender norms of the era.

One would be amiss to ignore the clear elephant in the room with both of these stories. In the former, we've discussed the slight towards Milverton's housemaid. We've not discussed perhaps the most prominent woman in the story, however. Unnamed and absent for the majority of the story's first two acts, the anonymous noblewoman who

ultimately murders Milverton is not just an outlier among Sherlockian women - she is an outlier among Sherlockian characters. She appears a dark horse to suddenly and brutally kill the perpetrator of the story's mystery and eschew the consequences of her actions. She shows an unusual amount of agency and demonstrates ruthlessness, strength, and revenge, traditionally masculine traits at the time. In *A Scandal in Bohemia*, Irene Adler famously bests Holmes. She escapes England with her husband, retains the photographs of interest, and in the end leaves Holmes and the King defeated. These two women rise above their station as merely caretakers and maternal figures, in a unique display of power and autonomy not typically granted to Victorian women, fictional or otherwise.

In spite of the noblewoman and Adler's famous defiance of gender roles, the large majority of Holmesian women do not see the same fate. Throughout the canon, Holmes makes "merry over the cleverness of women," dupes and deceives them, and plays on the instincts and expectations of Victorian women, mothers, and wives to achieve his ends. However, before Holmes is indicted as a cruel and traditionalistic manipulator, it is critical to consider the times he inhabited and the rules by which he worked and lived. And in the context of his world, his profession, and his mind, perhaps Holmes' amoral treatment of women can be justified after all.

All's Fair in Love and War

Thomas Hébert, 2nd Prize
10th – 12th Grade



When the law doesn't protect people, then people protect themselves [by] breaking the law." - Tamerlan Kuzgov.

In Arthur Conan Doyle's short story "A Scandal in Bohemia," Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson are approached by the king of Bohemia, who presents to them an alarming predicament which has befallen him. As a young man, he associated with one Irene Adler; but now, as he is about to be wed, Irene has threatened to release a compromising photograph of the two of them to the public. Trapped in a corner, the King enlists the help of Holmes and Watson. The pair face a moral dilemma in trying to recover the picture. Should they

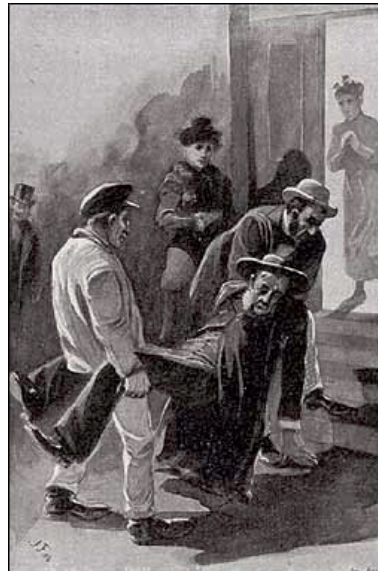


break the law to retrieve the photograph? Is the cause truly "excellent," and do the ends justify the means? Sherlock certainly thinks so, hatching a devious scheme to trick Ms. Irene Adler. The duo deceive the lady, entering her house under false pretenses as well as faking a fire in her home. Their decision is to ultimately break the law so that they can help the King. While some might argue it was unethical, Sherlock and Watson are entirely justified in their transgression due to the crime's triviality, the blackmailer's manipulation, and the affair's importance.

The insignificance of the pair's offense rationalizes their decision. In order to trick Adler, Holmes disguises himself as an elderly clergyman and fakes an injury to the face, compelling Irene to take him into her home to care for him. Soon after, Watson tosses a smoke bomb into the building, crying "Fire!" Afraid of losing the photo, Irene immediately rushes to her hiding place to retrieve it, revealing its location to Holmes (behind a sliding panel in the wall). Though it might

seem immoral, as well as a violation of Adler's rights, the crime had no major or long-lasting consequences, for her or for anyone else. The only offense Sherlock commits is misleading Irene and infiltrating her home to find the photograph. Nothing was stolen. No one was killed or sustained any kind of injury. Irene herself suffered nothing beyond temporary embarrassment. Despite the minor consequences that result, such a small offense is easily overlooked due to the worldwide upheaval it prevents. Because the crime was so insignificant and had few ramifications, Holmes and Watson's choice to transgress is undoubtedly justified.

The duo choose to break the law because they have been forced into a corner and have no alternative choice. When Irene threatened to release the photograph, she gave the King no way out whatsoever. She refused to either sell it to him or allow him to trade for it, stubbornly sticking to her ruinous vow. Adler told the King that she would publicize it on the day his betrothal was announced. The King, facing inevitable devastation, had nothing to do, so he went to Holmes. The great detective realizes that there is no option other than committing a minor crime. The King's men have already tried twice to steal back the picture, and did not even come close to finding it. Sherlock could have continued to try to settle the dispute diplomatically, but he wisely discerns the importance of haste in this affair. The King can neither afford to let the problem work itself out nor hope Irene will not go through with the deed. Holmes has to act quickly and with confidence. It is only through his quick-thinking efforts that the world is saved from turmoil. Irene's uncooperation effectively forces Sherlock and Watson to break the law.



Finally, the scandal that the King faces is a very significant issue with major, international implications. His upcoming marriage to a Scandinavian princess, Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, is vital to the strength of international relations. Had Irene released the photograph, she would have thrown the world into unrest. The King of Scandinavia would likely have become outraged at such a betrayal and declared war on Bohemia. In the Victorian era, alliances and animosities abounded in Europe. Any declaration of war would see many more nations line up on two sides, forming a great fissure in between. Allies would defend allies, while enemies would jump at the chance to defeat each other. Europe would have been overcome with chaos, all resulting from

Irene's decision to disclose the photo. Nearly any offense would be admissible in order to help a monarch avoid a major multinational conflict!

The crime's inconsequence, Irene's defiance, and the case's import indisputably vindicates Sherlock and Watson's choice to break the law. In the end, the pair only committed their crime due to an "excellent cause." They took matters into their own hands to protect the King and avoid a war. The damage that resulted from their offense was undoubtedly far less extreme than the release of the photo would have been. Indeed, the ending is a happy one for everyone involved. Irene agrees to keep the photo to herself, and the King trusts her word. She is able to run away and marry Mr. Norton, while the King is free to wed Clothilde, confident that his slight misconduct will never be revealed to the world. The only unhappy one might be Holmes himself, outsmarted for the first, last, and only time by a woman.

Sherlock and Watson's Untold Confessions

**Nicole Eutsler, 3rd Prize
10th – 12th Grade**



Sherlock Holmes proves to be an untrustworthy citizen by allowing the deaths that occur go unpunished and keeping the killers of England secret in certain circumstances. Justice cannot be served if a third party interferes with the crime and lets the menace in society escape the grasp of justice. Despite Sherlock solving the cases at his disposal, he does not turn the perpetrators into the authorities.

In "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton" and "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot," Sherlock Holmes learns inside information on a murder case, and chooses to let the offender go and roam free in society. As a private citizen, Sherlock Holmes does not have the right to make decisions that the London authorities should be making, especially when it comes to cases he is not explicitly assigned to by said authority.



In the story "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," Sherlock and Watson witness the murder of Charles Augustus Milverton and stand idly by without turning in the killer. As English citizens, it is their duty to report such behavior, and by failing to do that they should face repercussions. The perpetrator needs to face their justice, and Holmes and Watson prevent that from happening, which is not their call to make in the first place. By breaking into Milverton's house, they are already putting themselves in a sticky situation, and by witnessing a murder they should be in the court room serving as witnesses to the case. Holmes and Watson need to be honest and reveal the truth. No circumstance justifies a murder. The woman

should be held accountable for shooting Milverton, and Holmes and Watson should reveal the truth of the situation.

"The Adventure of the Devil's Foot" reveals that Mr. Mortimer Tregennis, an heir to a divided family inheritance, has malicious intentions to keep the money for himself, and he executes his murder plot to achieve that. However, when Dr. Sterndale finds out that Mortimer killed his lover Brenda, Mortimer's sister, he gives him a taste of his own medicine. Dr. Sterndale kills Mortimer, and much to Sterndale's grief and dismay, Holmes and Watson find out about his killing. Rather than do the just thing and report their findings, Holmes goes the unethical route to protect a heartbroken killer. Holmes' actions are not justified, especially because he is not legally assigned to the case. His decisions on the imprisonment status of Dr. Sterndale are uncalled for and inappropriate.



There are quite a few ethical dilemmas presented in these stories, but the most remarkable of them being the easy escape of perpetrators at the mercy of Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock shows robotic and sociopathic qualities that virtually no other person possesses, however his forgiveness shows at arguably the worst moments. When Sherlock needs to turn in the evidence he has gathered into the authorities, he fails to do so, unfortunately in certain cases when he has a killer on his hands. Rather than sticking to his intellectual wit and fact-based thinking, he allows his emotions to get the best of him, which affects the benefit of the common good and the fairness of society. Holmes chooses to go against turning Dr. Sterndale into the police, and he gains a glimpse of Sterndale's private affairs with a victim which alters his mentality about Sterndale's need for a sentence. Other felons that Holmes turns in may have a similar case in their personal lives, but they never express them aloud to Sherlock. Sherlock Holmes appears ignorant of the intentions behind other perpetrators' actions, but just the knowing of love as the driving force was enough for Holmes to smudge the honesty of the case.

Moral blockage may play into Holmes' decision making, however his feelings should be put aside for the sake of the judicial system and justice of the guilty. Personal bias and feeling should never play into the fate of someone who killed another person. The cold hard truth of murder stands among the worst crimes, and

Holmes' arbitrary reasons to look past it cannot be justified. Sherlock Holmes has no right to call for a fellow private citizen's imprisonment or freedom. Furthermore, Holmes is known for his standoffish behavior and sociopathic tendencies which may alter his judgment. Even the strongest morals should not affect a murder case's conclusion, and Holmes proves that he lacks equity and impartiality when deciphering a case. As a private citizen, Sherlock Holmes does not have the right to judge the guilty's punishment, and he shows himself to be a societal menace to the impartial judicial system of London.

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