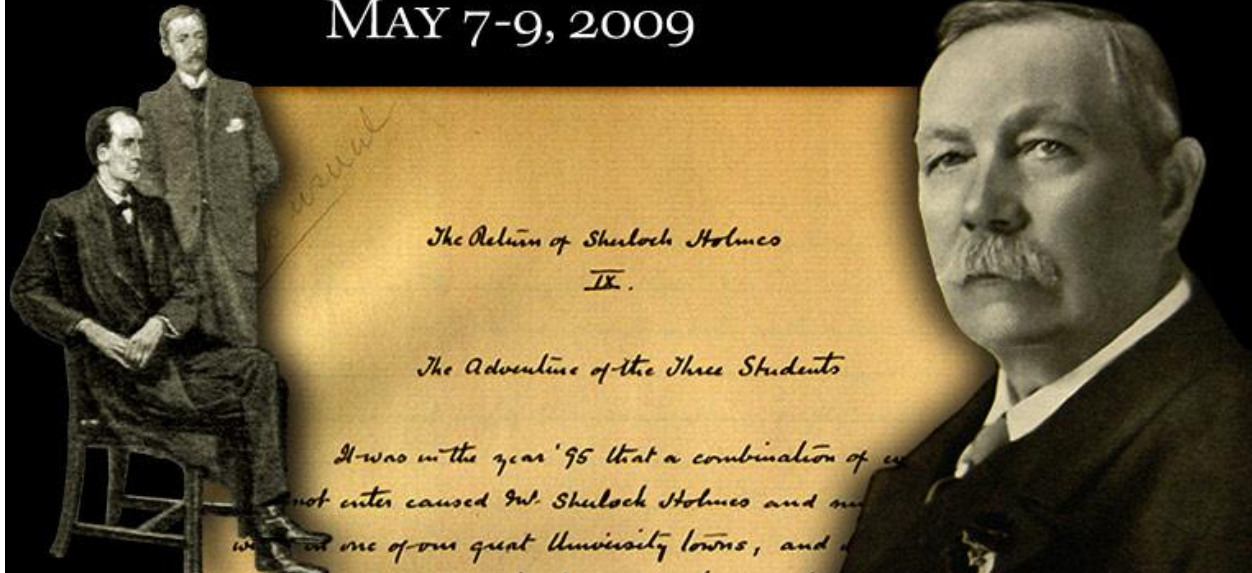


# SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE: A SESQUICENTENNIAL ASSESSMENT

MAY 7-9, 2009



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## Children Yet Unborn (How We Envy Them!)

### TEACHING CONAN DOYLE

Richard Olken

*Let us pray.*

*Dear Heavenly Father, behold a gathering united in a common bond, to wit, the desire to commemorate and to honor two who were ever swift to succor those who suffered injustice. We thank You for granting to us Holmes and Watson and for giving us the gift of retaining, all throughout our lives, a child's wonder and a child's love for a worthy hero.*

*Bless we pray, Her Britannic Majesty, Elizabeth the Second, gloriously reigning, and the President of the United States and grant that our two nations which, as Oscar Wilde observed, "have everything in common...except language" will ever live in amity, prosperity, and peace.*

*Grant that each of us may be found so steadfast and faithful in stewardship to this rare and magnificent organization, that children yet unborn (how we envy them!) will eagerly join the never-ending throng who have followed, emulated and loved the two old comrades we honour here tonight. Grant that they will one day take our places.*

*Amen.*

That was an excerpt from the wonderful *Prayer for The Speckled Band of Boston* (1) by the late Tom Grady, with which each meeting of The Band opens. It establishes as a first principal that we must endeavor to pass the torch of Sherlockian interest and scholarship to future generations. But how do we enable enthusiasts and educators to achieve this goal?

In concluding *Good Stewards: Promoting Conan Doyle's Literary Legacy*, the final session of the Houghton Library's Arthur Conan Doyle Sesquicentennial Assessment, I shall introduce you to The Beacon Society and our efforts to recognize, encourage and assist devotees of the writings of Doctors Doyle and Watson in passing on their love for the works of these wonderful storytellers to future generations.

A number of Sherlockians have taken it upon themselves to develop methods and curricula that will enable educators to expand the circle of devotees of the Sherlock Holmes Canon and Doyle's other writings. This often takes the form of direct interactions between individuals and their local communities. The first Sherlockian to introduce me to personal action for literacy was the late Dr. Hyman Shrand (*right*) who described his initiative to introduce the Canon to schoolchildren by arranging to come to the local elementary school in Truro, Massachusetts in Sherlockian costume to read and discuss the *Adventures* with them in their classroom. Hyman had retired as head of the Pediatrics Department at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge and was living in Truro in the early 1990's, where he found himself looking for satisfying activities in his retirement. He took up painting,



and wrote, "I now realize that for the past 50 years I was a painter wrapped up in the body of a pediatrician." (2) Hyman was quite talented as you can see in the illustration (*left*), a self-portrait entitled 'Sherlock Holmes as Hyman Shrand.' Finding that he had more than enough time and energy he took it upon himself to put on his deerstalker hat, go to the Truro Central School and read Sherlock Holmes stories to the schoolchildren. His visits were always appreciated by the teachers and by many of the students as was attested to me recently by Abby



Roderick, one of the students who adored Hyman and his presentations. Ms. Roderick is now a teaching assistant at the Truro Central School and she credits Hyman Shrand with providing her most treasured grammar school memories.

There have been a number of activities like Hy Shrand's, some informal and personal, and some with formal curricula developed by educators. These independent efforts have yielded Sherlockian curricula and materials for a variety of age and ability audiences. Sherlockians have long discussed the possibilities for organizing these efforts to provide a framework for propagating Canonical curricula.



In 2002 Maribeau Briggs (*left*), an active Sherlockian in the New York area, pressed a number of her like-minded friends to form an organization to formalize these endeavors to encourage literacy by introducing children to the pleasures of the Sherlock Holmes Canon. Her efforts led to an organizational meeting held at the Algonquin Hotel in Manhattan during the January 2003 Baker Street Irregulars Birthday Weekend events. About

two dozen Sherlockians came to the founding meeting and

pledged to make Maribeau's vision a reality.



The organization born from that meeting was named The Beacon Society, based on a quote from *The Adventure of the Naval Treaty* in the *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, in which Holmes says to Watson,

*"Look at those big, isolated clumps of buildings rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-coloured sea."*

*"The board-schools."*

*"Light-houses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future."* (3)



The Beacon Society defines our mission to be "Supporting and recognizing exemplary efforts in educational experiences that introduce young people to the Canon." To that end we seek and honor best existing efforts and educators with two recognition programs, the Beacon Award and the Jan Stauber Grant.

Each January, the annual Beacon Award recognizes a project that successfully introduced young people to the Sherlock Holmes stories. Since 2004 we have bestowed Beacon Awards on seven programs, five of which are targeted at students in middle school, one is a high school curriculum, and the most recent recipient created a college course.

To illustrate the quality of Beacon Award honorees, I will describe three of the programs that garnered Beacon Awards and the wonderful people behind those programs. They are the most recent Beacon Award recipient, Dr. Tracy Revels; one of the 2007 winners, Peter Burkhart; and the very first Beacon Society honoree, the late Jan Stauber. Dr. Revels and Mr. Burkhart are teachers whose courses brought Doyle's stories and characters into approved curricula. Jan

Stauber's story will demonstrate that a determined volunteer can enhance the middle-school reading experience with a well-planned and well-presented program.



The 2009 recipient of the Beacon Award is Dr. Tracy J. Revels (*left*), Associate Professor of History at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. In addition to the Beacon Award, Dr. Revels also earned the Florida Historical Society's Rembert Patrick Award for Best Scholarly Book on Florida History for her work, *Grander in Her Daughters: Florida's Women during the Civil War*. (4)

Dr. Revels' interest in Sherlock Holmes adventures commenced in the 5th grade when she read *The Speckled Band* and correctly deduced in mid-story that the band must be a snake. In addition to her courses in Ancient, Modern, and United States history, she developed and teaches a course on the Sherlock Holmes Canon and the Victorian Era.

Early in her teaching career at Wofford College Dr. Revels was scheduled to teach an 'interim,' a one-month course given in January that is based in experiential teaching. She decided to combine her love of the Canon with her professional interest in history by employing Sherlock Holmes' adventures as the foundation for her students' study of the Victorian period and Victorian society.

Her 'interim' was so well received that she expanded it into Humanities 101, a full semester course that studies the Holmes stories and the Victorians in depth and also connects Holmes to current society and the many places that the Sherlock Holmes character or his attributes appear in popular culture.

Dr. Revels' objective for Humanities 101 is to help students become better writers and critical thinkers by using the Sherlock Holmes stories and the historical world of Victorian England as a springboard. She challenge students to critique and analyze the stories as works of literature and as mysteries, and to consider questions of morality and ethics that the tales raise.

The central theme of Dr. Revels' Humanities 101 course is the power of observation and how it can be of use in stories and in real life. Students apply the methods of deductive reasoning to various classroom challenges in order become better thinkers, more observant of the world around them, and more aware of the need for precision in their academic work. Using Leslie Klinger's *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes* as their text, students in Humanities 101 read three of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes novels and 18 of the short stories for class discussion. They also study several films and television productions and discuss related topics and issues.

Each of Dr. Revels' students completes five essays, and the class is divided into groups for group reports on assigned topics. A final paper is required in lieu of a final examination. A student's grade is based on quiz scores, the group report, essays, the final paper, creative work, and her or his enthusiasm in class participation.

The group reports are done in pairs or trios that are each assigned one of these topics: (5)

- Life and Reign of Queen Victoria
- The Indian Mutiny
- Victorian Servants
- Victorian Sports
- Spiritualism
- Victorian Medicine
- Jack the Ripper

Dr. Revels does not require a written group report, rather each group is responsible for developing a bibliography documenting their sources and for presenting a 'lesson' to the class. The lesson is at least 30 minutes long and must include an audio/visual component and a class exercise such as a quiz or contest. Each student also completes a work that demonstrates imagination and originality. This work may be a parody, a pastiche, an artwork, a skit, or a video.

The final paper is on one of these four topics:

1. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr. Watson becomes a friend to the very eccentric Sherlock Holmes. Using a pseudonym for him/her, describe the most eccentric friend that you have and discuss what makes your friendship work.
2. In the stories we've read, we have encountered a number of Victorian attitudes that are, by our standards, racist. What group of people do you believe are most commonly and unfairly depicted in today's entertainment media? Give examples to support your argument.
3. Is *The Hound of the Baskervilles* a Sherlock Holmes novel or a Dr. Watson novel?
4. If you could be magically transported in time back to Victorian London, what aspects of life would you most like to investigate and why? What would you hope to learn?

I am sure there are a number of people in this room, including myself, who wish that a course like this one had been offered to us as undergraduates.

Dr. Revels told me that every year there are students who enter her class already enamored of the Holmes' stories and every year there are others in the class who become devotees of the Canon. She said that presenting the values seen in the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson enables her to promote those values to her students, and that they too enjoy the stories and playing the Great Game.

She recounts, "Last fall semester, I had a student in my Sherlock Holmes humanities class who was a natural-born storyteller. Almost every Monday he would be spinning some tale, either of his high school adventures or his weekend mischief, that would have his fellow students spellbound. His papers showed promise, only needing to be more carefully proofread and

tweaked. I fussed at him whenever I felt he was being just a bit lazy, and I told him, over and over again, that I thought he had the makings of a good writer. Maybe he should grow up to be an English major.”

“He would roll his eyes and insist that he wasn’t about to do that!”

“Today, when he came in for advising, he sheepishly admitted that he’s discovered he loves words, enjoys writing stories, and just ‘likes to think about what literature means.’ And he’s going to be an English major.”

“I feel like Sherlock Holmes after a particularly brilliant deduction!”(6)

Peter Burkhart, one of the 2007 honorees of the Beacon Society, was a middle school teacher in New York City when he introduced his seventh grade honor students to Arthur Conan Doyle’s work. After his school adopted the America’s Choice program which entails studying a single author over a series of works, he found that the recommended author, Gary Soto, was not an appropriate choice for honors level students because his works did not challenge students who were reading well above grade level.

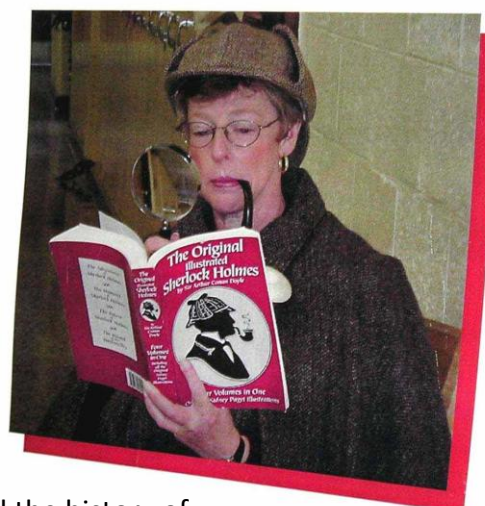
Peter found that one problem in using a single author’s works is the dramatic change in the reading level from book to book. He attempted to use stories by John Steinbeck but his stories vary widely in their reading level. For example, Peter’s students were able to understand and enjoy “Of Mice and Men” but struggled with “The Grapes of Wrath.”

As a Sherlockian, Peter was disappointed to find very little prior movement in using Doyle’s works in middle and high school literature study. In addition to having his own Sherlockian interest, Burkhart realized that Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories maintain the same reading level, follow a similar pattern and use the same main characters throughout. This provides higher achieving middle school readers the opportunity to explore character development, improve critical thinking skills, learn new vocabulary, analyze style and participate in discussions about a body of literary work. It ultimately leaves students with the knowledge to participate confidently in future discussions with Holmes enthusiasts.

Peter Burkhart sought guest speakers from Sherlockian societies and supplemented the course work with role-playing activities. His future plans for enhancing student experiences with his curriculum included inviting guests from dog breeding associations to discuss the use of dogs to track scents, and having a detective from the New York City Police Department speak about forensic science and crime-solving techniques.

Burkhart noted that his students finished the course with a “firm grasp of a literary Canon that has remained popular since its creation.” (7) He noted that it was the first time that students in his school system had completed two novel-length adventures and 11 additional stories by the same author with the same characters, something they likely would not have the opportunity to encounter again until they reach college.

The Beacon Society's first honoree in 2004 was Jan Stauber (*right*). Like Hyman Shrand, she visited classrooms in Inverness cape and deerstalker cap, carrying a calabash pipe and magnifying glass. Jan became Sherlock Holmes to 7th and 8th grade students at the Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Verona, New Jersey. Jan went beyond what Hyman Shrand did by working with teachers to prepare their students for her visits, suggesting curricula to help them integrate her visits with their ongoing studies. Jan presented the life of Sir Arthur and how his studies with Dr. Joseph Bell had informed his development of Holmes' deductive reasoning. She presented the history of Holmes along with insights into late 19th century English life, giving the students background information facilitating their understanding and enjoyment of the stories.



Jan's seventh grade students were primed for her visits by reading a play based on *The Dying Detective* while the eighth grade students prepared by reading *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*. Before getting into discussion with the students, she would 'study' various students with her magnifying glass and make 'deductions' about them, immediately engaging their interest.

Jan discussed the stories, including how Holmes' deductions moved the plots, the relationship between Holmes and Watson, and Holmes' ability to unravel knotty problems without modern tests, instruments, or computers to help with his researches. After discussing the assigned stories, Jan described the plots of other Holmes adventures, much to the delight of the students, who particularly enjoyed hearing about *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Jan Stauber's personal presentations, like Hyman Shrand's, have inspired others to take similar programs to classrooms. Sherlockians who have themselves become classroom versions of the Great Detective have developed the following five components for a successful visit:

- First, whet the students' interest by coordinating with the teacher to assign a Sherlock Holmes story, film or play prior to the classroom visit; the teacher can also discuss related topics, such as the Victorian era, famous characters, or detectives.
- Second, it's fun for the Sherlockian presenter to appear in costume, with deerstalker, Inverness cape, pipe, magnifying glass, and other appropriate items in order to engage the students and to create talking points to facilitate discussion.
- Publicity generates enthusiasm and interest for the students' Sherlockian experience. Sherlockians have given interviews to school and local newspapers, posed in costume for photos with the students, and created events such as a Sherlock Holmes birthday party in January. Making a presentation with a detective from the local police department may be a welcome community tie-in.

- Jan Stauber found that students enjoyed seeing Sherlockian toys from her collection, and others have brought other items, including various editions of the Adventures, especially the original **Strand** magazines and foreign language editions. Explaining each item of Sherlockian garb and accessories, and their origins in the Canon, on stage, or in films, also engages the students' interest.
- Finally, it's good to have a number of prepared topics so the Sherlockian presenter is ready to create and steer conversation to suit the interests of the student audience. Topic suggestions include:
  - Arthur Conan Doyle and how he learned from Dr. Joseph Bell
  - The number of Sherlock Holmes stories and the number of languages into which the Canon has been translated
  - Dr. Watson and the relationship between Holmes and Watson
  - The lack of modern forensic tests and instruments in Holmes' era
  - Sherlock Holmes' 'death' and the Great Hiatus
  - Descriptions of some of the plots. Girls might enjoy Irene Adler and her place in the Canon
  - Make Sherlock-style deductions about some of the students.

Jan Stauber concluded her presentations by telling the students about the breadth of Doyle's other works. She reported that she always knew how well she had succeeded by the number of student requests for websites where they could find additional information on the various stories and ideas that had been discussed.(9) From the time she started her school visit program in 1998 until her untimely death in 2005, Jan brought Doyle and Holmes to over 600 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. She also left us a curriculum that will be used to reach many others.

The Beacon Society recently established another recognition program named the Jan Stauber Grant, in honor of our first Beacon Award Winner. The Jan Stauber Grant will bestow upon each grantee a sum of money to fund a proposal to develop a project advancing literacy by introducing young people to the Sherlock Holmes stories. The Stauber Grant's mission is to provide financial assistance to persons and organizations proposing literacy projects and other educational experiences using the Sherlock Holmes Canon. Our goals for the Beacon Society include encouraging young people to read and introducing more youngsters to Sherlock Holmes, providing financial support to projects introducing more young people to Sherlock Holmes, using financial assistance to encourage non-Sherlockians to develop such projects, and honoring Jan Stauber's work in introducing young people to Sherlock Holmes.

In the first five years of its existence, the Beacon Society has collected and developed a number of curriculum ideas and plans that can now be found on our website, [www.BeaconSociety.com](http://www.BeaconSociety.com).

It is gratifying to know that the love of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories has become the basis for many programs to spread literacy and critical thinking. We encourage academics at all levels to



develop courses studying the whole range of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's literary creation, including his journalism and histories, historical novels, science fiction and the 4 novels and 56 short stories featuring two of the most universally known figures in English literature.

I wish to thank the Houghton Library and Harvard University for providing this forum for the celebration of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle on his sesquicentennial birthday and to thank them and you for giving me the opportunity to introduce the Beacon Society and some of the wonderful programs and people who keep the memory of the Master green by using Doyle's works to bring young people the love of a good story well-told. I hope that one day Sir Arthur Conan Doyle will be more universally recognized as a major author worthy of study throughout the academic world, and that Harvard, blessed as it is with its magnificent Doyle collections and Sherlockian resources, will lead the way.

At the opening of my presentation I noted that a Boston scion society opens its meetings with the *Prayer for The Speckled Band of Boston* that contains the aspiration that "children yet unborn (how we envy them!) will eagerly join the never-ending throng ...who have followed, emulated and loved the two old comrades we honor here" and their creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It is also customary at meetings of a number of Sherlockian societies to recite the pledge contained in *The Musgrave Ritual*. In addition to being an ancient family rite that makes possible the plot of a very good story, the Ritual has come to symbolize the responsibility of Sherlockians to pass on our love of the Canon to future generations. I shall therefore close with an abbreviated version of the Musgrave Ritual and I invite you to recite it responsively with me as our pledge to keep the Master's and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's memories green.

Whose is it?

*His who is gone.*

Who shall have it?

*He who will come.*

What shall we give for it?

*All that is ours.*

Why should we give it?

*For the sake of the trust. (10)*



## THE BEACON SOCIETY

*Supporting and recognizing exemplary educational experiences  
that introduce young people to the Sherlock Holmes stories*



*A Scion Society of the  
Baker Street Irregulars*

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