STUDY GUIDE FOR THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

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**Date of The Adventure of The Red-Headed League**

Although the story may contain other clues as to the date of the adventure, use only the clues shown below. Your goal is to use only logical reasoning to find the date of the attempted burglary at the bank.

**CLUES:**

1. The story was published in August 1891.
2. It was “autumn of last year.”
3. The Red-Headed League was dissolved on October 9, 1890.
4. Holmes says “To-day (the day of the attempted burglary) is Saturday…”
5. October 9, 1890 was Thursday.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

A. 1 and 2 imply it was autumn of 1890.
B. A and 3 imply it was October 1890 shortly after the 9th.
C. B, 4, and 5 imply it was Saturday, October 11, 1890.

The attempted burglary of the bank was on Saturday, October 11, 1890
**The Red-Headed League Vocabulary Words**

acute  extremely sharp
Albert chain  a watch-chain made of heavy links, named for Queen Victoria’s husband, Prince Albert, who wore such a chain
aperture  opening
askance  with disapproval, suspicion, or distrust
barrow  wheelbarrow
billet  job
blotting paper  absorbent paper used to blot a surface by soaking up excess ink
bracelets  handcuffs
bullion  gold or silver in the form of bars or ingots
chagrin  disappointment or mental uneasiness
cobbler’s wax  shoe polish
consequential  self-important
conundrums  riddles whose solution involves a play on words; puns
coster  short for costermonger which means fruit seller
crib  berth, job, bank
curt  using few words; terse
dank  disagreeably damp
dark lantern  lantern with a sliding door which, when shut, gives no light
deal  wooden
deference  courteously yielding to the wishes of another
derbies  handcuffs
embellish  to add ornamental or fictitious details to
ennui  listlessness from lack of interest; boredom
flags  flagstones
florid  flushed with rosy color; ruddy
foolscap  13” x 16” writing sheets with a fool’s cap and bells as a watermark
footpaths  sidewalks
frock-coat  knee-length, double-breasted coat; a gentleman’s ordinary daytime costume
George Sand  pen name of Amandine Aurore Lucie Dupin, Baroness Dudevant (1804-1876); she was a French writer whose novels, plays, and essays concern the freedom and independence of woman

gilt  resembling gold
greatcoat  large heavy overcoat

**Gustave Flaubert**  French writer considered a forerunner of naturalism and known for his precise literary style (1821-1880)

hansom  two-wheeled, one-horse carriage seating two with the driver mounted behind and reins going over the roof of the hood; invented by J.A. Hansom, a Yorkshire architect who patented the cab in 1834

hunting crop  short whip used to make a horse run faster

introspective  prone to self-examination
L’homme c’est rien – l’oeuvre c’est tout
French: “Man is nothing – work is everything” (The correct quotation is: L’homme n’est rien, l’oeuvre tout from a letter to George Sand from Gustave Flaubert.)
labyrinth intricate structure of interconnecting passages through which it is difficult to find one’s way
languid showing little or no spirit; listless
languor lack of physical or mental energy; listlessness
lithe having effortless grace
loftily arrogantly; haughtily
lurid shining with the glare of fire through a haze
nocturnal occurring in the night
obese extremely fat; grossly overweight
partie carrée party of four
pavement sidewalk
poky small and cramped
pompous having excessive self-esteem or exaggerated dignity
portly comfortably stout
press a cupboard, usually with shelves and used to hold clothes, books, etc.
Omne ignotum pro magnifico
Latin for “Everything unknown passes for something splendid.” – Publius Cornelius Tacitus
quill-pen pen made from the hollow stem-like main shaft of a feather taken from a fowl
rendering violently splitting apart
rubber series of three games to decide a winner
settee an indoor seat with a back and arms for two or more persons; a sofa
shabby-genteel striving to convey an appearance of refinement and respectability but starting to show signs of wear and tear
shepherd’s check trousers woollen trousers with a black and white checked pattern
shutters wooden coverings for the shop windows
singular beyond what is ordinary or usual; remarkable
skirts coattails
smasher someone who passes counterfeit money
snigger partly stifled laugh
solicitor lawyer who practices law but is not permitted to appear as counsel in court
sovereign gold coin worth one pound
stalls seats in the front section of parquet (orchestra)
tenacious holding on persistently
the City financial district of London
waistcoat vest
The Red-Headed League Open Questions

1. Would not Spaulding (the fourth smartest man in London) have recognized Holmes?

Perhaps he did but wanted to see if he could outwit Holmes.

2. Why didn’t Clay just steal the keys from Merryweather rather than go to the trouble of digging a tunnel?

That would be too easy for Clay who wanted to show off his skill as a criminal.

3. Where did Clay put the dirt that he excavated?

Good question. There doesn’t seem to be anywhere unless the basement was very large.

4. Why was the French gold not in the Bank of England or at least in the strong room of the bank’s head office? After all, they “had several warnings.”

Merryweather wasn’t the brightest of bankers.

5. Why did Holmes knock at the door of the pawn shop, a shop that is open to the public?

If Holmes had entered the pawn shop, there was a good chance that Spaulding would be standing behind the counter. If so, Holmes would not have been able to see the knees of his trousers.


“I’ll swing for it” sounds like Clay expected to be hanged. This implies that they had killed Jabez Wilson.

7. Why was the League dissolved before the job was done? One more week at four pounds, and they would not have been caught.

It could be that the criminals ran out of money to pay Jabez Wilson.
The Red-Headed League Simple Quiz*

1. Jabez Wilson owned
   a. a grocery store
   b. a pawn shop
   c. a print shop
   d. none of the above

2. The criminals planned to
   a. kidnap Jabez Wilson
   b. rob a bank
   c. destroy the underground (subway)
   d. none of the above

3. Vincent Spaulding was also known as
   a. John Clay
   b. Merryweather
   c. Athelney Jones
   d. none of the above

*The Simple Quiz is designed to determine if the student has read the story. Anyone who has read the story through should have no trouble in completing this quiz. This Intermediate and Advanced Quizzes are more challenging.
The Red-Headed League Intermediate Quiz*

1. Holmes said that Vincent Spaulding was
   a. the fourth most dangerous man in London
   b. the fourth smartest man in London
   c. the fourth vilest man in London
   d. none of the above

2. What was Jabez Wilson’s nautical occupation?
   a. ship’s captain
   b. ship’s carpenter
   c. first mate
   d. none of the above

3. What letter was Jabez Wilson about to start copying from the Encyclopaedia Britannica when the Red-Headed League was dissolved?
   a. B
   b. C
   c. D
   d. none of the above

4. The men awaiting an interview for the job with the Red-Headed League made the street look like
   a. a barrel of red apples
   b. a coster’s orange barrow
   c. a field of pink flowers
   d. none of the above

*The Intermediate Quiz is designed to test whether the student has read the story with reasonable attention to detail. The Simple Quiz is an easier test while the Advanced Quiz is much more challenging.
The Red-Headed League Advanced Quiz*

1. Where did the founder of the Red-Headed League, Ezekiah Hopkins, live?
   a. Kansas City, Missouri
   b. Lebanon, Pennsylvania
   c. San Francisco, California
   d. none of the above

2. Where were the offices of the Red-Headed League?
   a. 8 Fleet Street
   b. 17 King Edward Street
   c. 7 Pope’s Court
   d. none of the above

3. What hours did Jabez Wilson work each day for the Red-Headed League?
   a. nine to three
   b. ten to two
   c. eleven to three
   d. none of the above

4. What was on the breast pin that Jabez Wilson wore?
   a. an arc-and-compass
   b. a gold star
   c. a pink fish
   d. none of the above

*The Advanced Quiz is designed for aficionados of the Canon. The questions are quite challenging. The Intermediate and Simple Quizzes are designed for the more casual reader of the stories.
SIMPLE QUIZ ANSWERS: 1- b; 2- b; 3- a

INTERMEDIATE QUIZ ANSWERS: 1-b; 2-b; 3-a; 4-b

ADVANCED QUIZ ANSWERS: 1-b; 2-c; 3-b; 4-a