

Student Perspectives on Sherlock Holmes

The 2022 R. Joel Senter
Memorial Essay
Contest Prize
Winners

*Sponsored by
Mrs. Carolyn Senter*

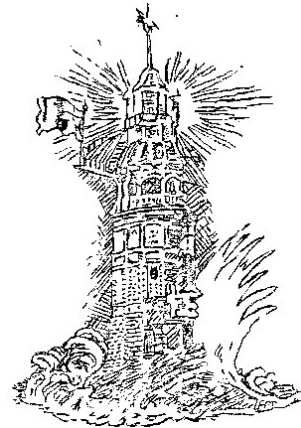
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The Beacon Society, a Scion Society of The Baker Street Irregulars*

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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:*

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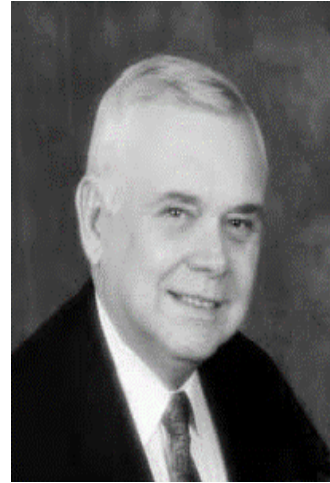
Peggy Perdue

Dan 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. Drove of them appeared to offer

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



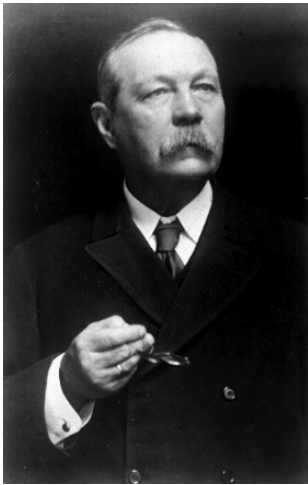
Carolyn decided to give back to this supportive community, and at the same time keep green Joel's memory, by creating the R. Joel Senter Memorial Prize for essays by young readers about Sherlock Holmes. It brings together two worlds that meant so much to R. Joel Senter Sr. – education and the Great Detective.

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.

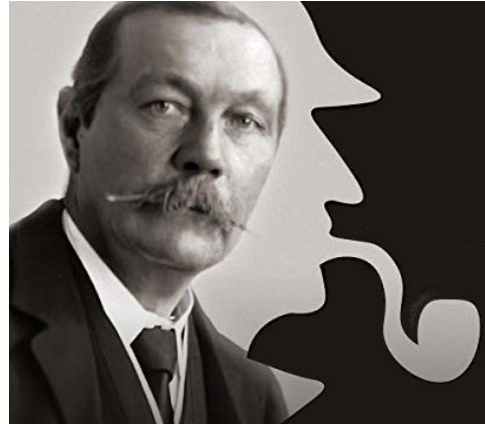
The second Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four*, followed in 1890. But Holmes really took off when Conan Doyle hit upon the idea of a series of stories about the same character to run each month in a magazine. This had never been done before.

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>



Watson Is the Best Choice

**Dash Taylor, 1st Prize
4th – 6th Grade**

Whis essay is about the Speckled Band. It is a Sherlock Holmes story and told in the perspective of Watson. It was an interesting and detailed book full of surprises. I think that because it's told from Watson's point of view because he's not the one that solves it but he's always with Sherlock. Helen Stoner comes in and talks about how her sister mysteriously died but no one seems to know why! Let's dive in a little more!

First, Helen Stoner could not be in the point of view because she is not even there when he, Sherlock, actually solves it! Most books that's the whole point! Then we wouldn't even need the first scene because we would have already known the whole story (about her sister dying) and there would be no point in re-talking it out. Also, she would have already left when Sherlock explains his thinking to Watson. However, I think it would be interesting to see her in bed that night her sister dies, but that would be the only part that was interesting, so I suppose that would not be the best story.

Second, Mr. Roylott was a very interesting character because of his exotic animals, his estate, and most of all, his plot to kill. It was a very surprising part when he barges through Holmes's door and how he twists the fire poker and threatens Sherlock to not investigate around their property. It would be interesting if the reader could see the plot to kill and when the snake comes back at him "Looking up I see, snake comes down, screams, all fades to black," but still there would be no point in having this point of view because the Sherlock Holmes mysteries are to solve so the reader would already know the whole thing.

Sherlock has a very important role—being the detective! He had to almost solve the entire mystery. But if Sherlock told the story or was the point of view then he would solve it quickly that the snake killed Helen's sister and the reader wouldn't get a chance to solve the mystery. Sherlock would also have to explain how he solved the mystery even though the reader would already know the answer. So, there would be no point in





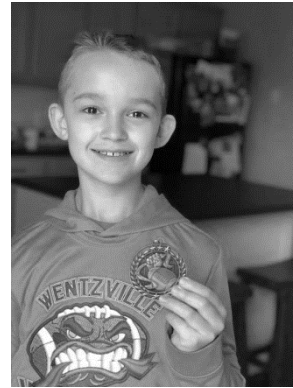
that explanation and the explanation is the best part (to me)! So... I think I've come to a conclusion!

If Helen Stoner, Mr. Roylott, and Sherlock Holmes all don't fit to be in point of view then I believe Arthur Conan Doyle made the best choice with Watson. His point of view is perfect because he's always with Sherlock and is in the room with him as he solves the mystery and save's the chance of more murder. Not only is this story fun to try to solve but the excitement of sitting in a dark

room waiting for something or someone, is teeth chattering. So... Watson is the best choice for point of view.

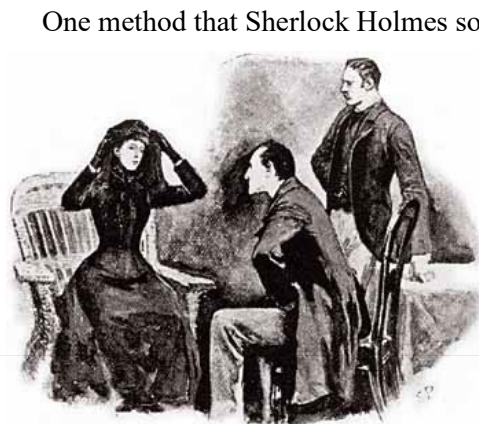
The Mystery of the Speckled Band

Levi Simms, 2nd Prize
4th – 6th Grade



My name is Levi Simms and I'm going to tell you

about the story of the speckled band. In the story of the speckled band, Sherlock Holmes uses a number of techniques to solve the mystery which was put upon them. An Example of his clever ways. Sherlock examines the room in which the crime occurs, Sherlock also searches for ways that the murderer could have possibly gotten inside the room. Finally Sherlock Holmes looks at things with great detail. Sherlock uses great quantities of techniques to solve many mysteries he is faced with.



One method that Sherlock Holmes solves the mysteries he is faced with is that he examines the room in which the crime occurred. One example of this is when he took in every detail in the room where Helens sister was killed. Another example of this is when he looked at a ventilation and put together that it led to Dr. Roylott's room. A final example is when Sherlock gets on the floor and looks very closely at the cracks in the floors looking about the length of them.

A second method that Sherlock Holmes used to solve the mystery is that he searches for ways that the killer could have possibly gotten in the room. An example of this is when he tested the strength of the boards that cover the windows which wouldn't easily be taken down. A second example of this is when Sherlock and Watson wait in a corner dead silent in the dark to see if Dr. Roylott would attempt to kill Helen. But in the ventilation, they see the faintest light coming from it.

A third and final method that Sherlock Holmes uses to solve this mystery is that he looks at things with great detail. An example of this is when Helen goes to Sherlock and Watson to ask for help, Sherlock asks her to tell the story of her sister's death in

exquisite detail. A second example of this is when he figured out most everything he needed to know, only using the appearance of the room. A final example of this is when Sherlock Holmes asks Helen for the setting of the crime.

So Sherlock Holmes aided by Watson solves a number of mysteries. Though they use a number of ways to possibly solve the mystery they are faced with. In the story of the speckled band Sherlock uses some methods including. Sherlock examines the room in which the crime occurred, he searches for ways that the killer could have possibly gotten in the room, and finally he looks at things with great detail.





An Incredible Likeness

Sabrina Kim, 1st Prize
7th – 9th Grade

As any casual Sherlock Holmes reader knows, John Watson and Sherlock Holmes are vastly different characters. Holmes is intelligent, aloof, and has a particular disdain for the frivolities of society, whereas Watson is kind, occasionally a little daft, and has a distinct taste for justice. However, upon closer inspection, the well-versed reader can find a paramount similarity between the two - a thrill-seeking, danger-loving streak. This adrenaline junkie behavior is a trait that allows them not only to live together but also to become a practically unstoppable duo.

For John Watson, the loyal companion, the desire for a precarious lifestyle appears to be an acquired taste. He frequently reminds readers of his involvement in the Second Afghan War - where, despite being a surgeon and not in battle himself, he was surrounded by action. Like many veterans, Watson likely found it difficult to readjust to the pace of peacetime and acclimate to living a life without constant peril. Instead of properly calibrating, Watson met and moved in with Holmes, whose life involved nearly as much hazard as Watson's in the army. Soon after he got caught up in Holmes' work, Watson didn't just adapt to it - he pursued it. In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," when Holmes woke Watson early for a case, Watson assured him that he "would not miss it for the world." He hastily arose to hear out the client's story, joining Holmes in yet another adventure. His eagerness to involve himself in yet another potentially life-threatening case is a likely example of the way Watson has transferred his army life to his real-world life - by filling the memory of his time in Afghanistan with equally harrowing, mentally exhaustive challenges at Holmes' side.



On the other hand, for Sherlock Holmes, his adventurousness perhaps originates less from his past than from how his brain is wired. In modern times, Holmes would likely be considered neurodivergent: likely on the autistic or OCD spectrums. Holmes' typically obsessive, thorough behavior and his unique abilities to observe what others simply

cannot are all telling signs of a brain that isn't necessarily wired like most peoples'. For Holmes, these differences are not a deficit. In fact, his brain is his most powerful weapon. It's well-documented that some people with autism or related mental differences have abilities that most people do not, something that Holmes portrays regularly. It is likely that whatever enables Holmes to observe to such a degree is also what drives him to obsessively track down cases to challenge his restless mind. In "The Adventure of the Red-Headed League," Watson reflects on Holmes' bizarre, erratic behavior, noting that he would frequently become lazy, only for these languorous periods to be broken up when "the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning power would rise to the level of intuition." This sporadic, drastic change recorded by Watson clearly displays Holmes' cognitive functions, which not only appear to be quite different from those of an average person, but also seem to pivot around his love for mystery and adventure.

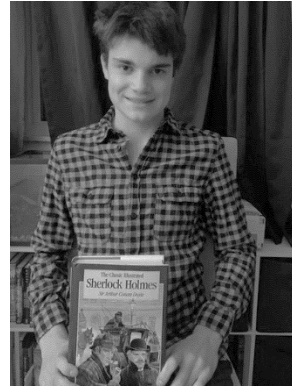


When both Watson and Holmes are engaged in a case, the deductive power of the both of them increases tenfold. Holmes' cerebral intelligence, though impressive on its own, is magnified by Watson's resourceful drive. There are countless cases throughout the canon in which the only way Holmes is able to find the solution to a mystery is through Watson's omnipresence, constant aid, and motivation. For instance, in "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange," despite the fact everything seems to be open-and-shut, Holmes admits that he "simply can't leave the case in this condition." This is followed by a lengthy scene of analysis in which both Watson and Holmes continue to dissect the circumstances, eventually to return and solve the case. As Holmes himself frequently dictates, he would be "lost without" Watson, who often shares observations and helps with the Baker Street cases. Watson's observations motivate Holmes, whose own deductions, in turn, motivate Watson. And, truly, if not for Watson's aid, the case of the Abbey Grange would have been ignored, and the culprit would have evaded acknowledgment forever.

Though Watson and Holmes are equally admirable men and problem-solvers in their own right, and though each has their own individual drive towards mental challenges and risky situations, when they work together towards a shared goal, no call to adventure is ever left unanswered.

The Red-Headed League

Ryan Foley, 2nd Prize (tie)
7th – 9th Grade



There are distinct differences between the sun and the moon. The moon gives off a glow, but the light comes from the sun. The sun, however, is the source of all illumination. Some people in this world have the gift of being enlightened, similar to the equilibrium of the sun and moon. The moon is the one that reflects the light of another star, the star being their inspiration. In the relationship between Watson and Holmes, the two exhibit similar qualities of this lunar light cycle. Watson, like the moon, reflects the light, the wisdom, of his partner, Sherlock Holmes.



Both characters are essential for this continuous relationship; however, it is clear that Holmes is the sun, the source of illumination, and Watson shines from Holmes's inspiration. In this essay, I will compare and contrast the differences and similarities between the two, including their differences in the powers of observation, and their similar quest for the truth, and lastly, and their shared love of the extraordinary, the unexplained, and the plain bizarre.

Holmes has a strong sense of paying attention to details, while Watson, in contrast, has a much less perceptive sense of observation. Holmes says, "As a rule, the more bizarre a thing is, the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify." This quote represents the wisdom and ingenuity of Holmes. He mentions that there is something "quite obvious" about the Red-Headed League, while Watson simply looks at the facts of the case instead of digging deeper. When Watson is perplexed by Mr. Jabez Wilson's strange job, Holmes realizes that the truth is literally beneath him, and when he shows them the tunnels, it is as if someone lit a candle in a dark cavern. Holmes reminds us that often the most obvious answers lie hidden in plain sight. It simply takes the right eye to see it.

Both Holmes and Watson possess a desire for truth and justice. In the story, Watson and Holmes both have a strong sense for justice, wanting to help Jabez Wilson. We do not know what sparks this sense of truth within them, but they often take the law into their own hands. Instead of relying on police officers, both have a high moral principle that they think is higher than the law. Holmes does this at little cost: in the story, he mentions, “I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing this very remarkable narrative from the Red-Headed League.” His passion for what he does shows commitment to the truth and his love of adventure. Watson too, seeks adventure and excitement while finding the truth.

As the reader sees in “The Red Headed League” and in “The Speckled Band”, the two mention their love for the unknown. The more unusual the case, the more excited the detectives get about it. This excitement, along with suspense, creates the ideal morale for a short story. “I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions of the humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if you excuse my saying so, somewhat to embellish so many of my own little adventures.” From this quote, it is clear that Holmes and Watson would much rather solve a case about a mysterious red-headed league or a speckled band than a typical case of finding missing jewelry.

As one can deduce, without the sun and the moon, darkness would fall upon us. Fortunately, because of Watson and Holmes, who bring light to London and beyond, we can see the truth, beauty, and all that is bizarre.

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Villains in Sherlock Holmes

Alexandra Thomas, 2nd Prize (tie)

7th – 9th Grade

TIn the classic work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, evil is defined in the quote “He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart.” These themes are further explored in literature from Victorian era England, displayed in the works of Arther Conan Doyle; the most popular of which are the stories of consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes. A few notable tales that illustrate these ideas are “The Adventure of the Speckled Band”, “The Adventure of the Red-Headed League”, and “The Adventure of the Abbey Grange”. In these three stories, good triumphs over evil as the villain in each story demonstrates a lack of empathy, greed, and a desire to inflict harm, while Sherlock Holmes triumphs by demonstrating his unselfish urges for justice and protection of the innocent.

First, in all three stories the villains demonstrate a lack of empathy. The villain Roylott allows anger to control his actions, resulting in many fights that his step-daughter, Helen, has to resolve. In the case of the villain Clay, his lack of empathy is clearly demonstrated through his deception of an innocent man, Mr. Wilson. Finally, Brackenstall demonstrates his lack of empathy in his drunken behavior and treatment of his wife and staff. He set his wife, Mary’s, dog on fire, which is proof enough of his apathy.

Next, the villains also demonstrate greed. Roylott’s motivation for killing his step-daughters is that in the event of their marriages, a substantial amount of money would go to them, which would cripple him financially, thus placing his wealth over the happiness of his daughters. The whole of Clay’s crime was for money, as they were robbing a bank. He is not a first-time thief, and as stated before, he does not care about the fate of others if he will receive a prize. Brackenstall is an interesting case of greed, for he does not display monetary greed, rather his drunken behavior could be another form of greed. Greed is “a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed,” which speaks to both his consumption of alcohol and his continuation of abusive behavior.

Then, all three villains demonstrate a desire to inflict harm. Roylott kills one of his daughters, and plots to kill the other, using his medical knowledge to prevent being caught. There is also proof of him abusing Helen prior to the murder attempt, and he “beat his native butler to death,” in anger over robberies. In the words of Mr. Merryweather, Clay is a “murderer, thief, smasher, and forger,” which proves he is

favorable towards harming others. Brackenstall also has proof of abuse, both towards his wife and staff. He stabbed Mary with a hatpin, hit her across the face before he was killed, and threw a decanter at her maid.

Sherlock Holmes, however, thwarts these villains through his urge to protect the innocent. He stands with the victims, Helen, Mary, and Mr. Wilson, and respects and believes their stories. He wants to believe the accounts of his clients, unless there is reason to think they should not be believed. He also does not require any payment beyond redress for personal expenses, which reveals his genuine intentions to aid them.

Holmes also thwarts the villains by his urge for justice. He allows Roylott to die, and is not remorseful, because Holmes opposes his plot to harm Helen for selfish reasons. In Clay's crime, he is happy to turn him over to the law, as he detests a crime born from selfish desire coupled with the deception of an innocent man. Holmes is unmoved by the death of Brackenstall, as he thinks that his fate is deserved from the mistreatment of his wife and staff. In the case of Crocker, he releases him with the condition that there should be no other victims, because his crime was out of love not hatred.

The villains demonstrated lack of empathy, greed, and a desire to inflict harm, while Holmes triumphed by protecting the innocent with his urge for justice. In these stories, Holmes is motivated by a desire to aid the victims, and not just to punish those who harm others. The victim is not always the one lying dead..

The Red-Headed League

Joshua Simms, 3rd Prize
7th – 9th Grade



The brilliant consulting detective that is Sherlock

Holmes uses his great powers of deduction to solve complex cases in Conan Doyle's stories. Sherlock Holmes's world is full of adventure and excitement from the moment Sherlock says "The game is afoot,". Though I'm no Sherlock Holmes, that doesn't mean that I don't use my own powers of deduction in my life, that being said I don't use them



for solving cases on which the wellbeing of thirty thousand napoleons depends. For instance, one time at school I was reading a book at the beginning of school, and people around me were talking about how a kid got suspended that morning. After a few minutes passed the bell rang and my teacher got up from their seat, I could tell something had upset him by the tired and grim look on his face. I was almost certain he was thinking about the one kid getting suspended. I also reasoned that he was about to talk about it because he was opening and closing his mouth while trying to find the right words.

When he started talking, I started to guess in my mind what he was going to say, my first thought was some kids got in a fight, I was, put simply, wrong. In the story "The Adventure of the Red-Headed League" I would've thought that "The Red-Headed League" was a bit... fishy but I would've never thought that it would be connected to a bank robbery in that which is being planned by John Clay a man from apparently "royal blood" and whom Holmes states to be the 4th smartest man in London. And even though this mastermind stood in his way (more like dug out of his way) Sherlock still solved this puzzle with precision and expertise.

As my teacher started to talk to my class, he stated that we as 8th graders should that more pride in our school and that we should take care of it. He then said that people vandalizing the school are going to receive their reward for doing such a terrible thing to our school.

Again, I was wrong about the reasoning of the suspension, I had all of the clues right in front of me I merely didn't see or recognize them. For instance, while I was walking into class, I saw that the men's restroom was closed and there were people inside cleaning. This was strange as the school was cleaned after school not during it. Also, there was more traffic in the student office than normal stating that something had to have happened that morning. The clues to this small puzzle were as Sherlock would put it "Elementary, my dear Watson,".

But just because I am no detective like Sherlock Holmes doesn't mean that thinking like him isn't important. If you master the powers of deduction in your life then you will be able to read people's body language and predict what they are going to say even before they say it!

But as for me I still have a lot of work to do on my skills of deduction, I need to stop treating small and seemingly unimportant facts that seem useless and see them as important facts that to a puzzle that I don't even know to exist in the first place. We can all use a little more basic thinking in our everyday lives, if we did, we would stop making little mistakes that lead to life-changing decisions that lead to big consequences.



Justice and Sherlock Holmes

Jonathan Scheopner, 1st Prize
10th – 12th Grade



"In principle and in practice... the rarest of all human qualities is consistency."⁽¹⁾ In stating such wisdom, English philosopher Jeremy Bentham explained the most valuable quality of Sherlock Holmes—an unyielding stance on justice. "Jeremy Bentham (1748—1832) was the father of utilitarianism,"⁽²⁾ believing an action ought to be judged by the extent it furthers human utility. That is to say, the action which produces well-being for the greatest number of people is deemed morally acceptable. The issue with such thinking lies in consequentialism, wherein an action is deemed moral based solely on the outcome, regardless of the actions taken to achieve the result. The antithesis of these ideas is the philosophy of deontology. Deontology states that the ends do not justify the means, rather, the actions to a product determine whether it is deemed ethical.⁽³⁾ The principle of deontology considers the people harmed in the process rather than those helped in the end. Deontology provides the opportunity to weigh an action on multiple levels. The interplay of these three philosophies can be observed in "A Scandal in Bohemia," and



"The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," where, in justifying unethical behavior "for the greater good," Holmes begins down a slippery slope of immoral decisions and becomes blind to objective moral truth.

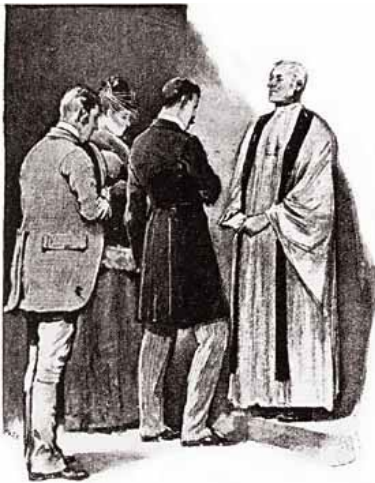
In "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," Holmes enters into an engagement with Milverton's housemaid in order to gain information through the relationship. Although Holmes gains the intelligence he needs, the detective manipulates the maid in the process. Holmes contends the stakes made the action necessary, claiming: "You can't help it, my dear Watson. You must play your cards as best you can when such a stake is on the table."⁽⁴⁾ Sherlock's intended aim was to save his client's relationship. In order to do this, Holmes assumed the persona of a plumber, building and consequently, tearing apart an engagement. To achieve his desired end – saving one relationship – Holmes ruined another.

The circumstance did not warrant such action; however, in this example, we discover the first enigma of Sherlock Holmes' personality. Sherlock is consistent in his interactions with people, treating everyone uniformly. In another short story, "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot," Holmes manipulates Dr. Watson into participating in a dangerous experiment in order to test an imported drug. Although this example does not involve disguises, it serves to remind us that the detective will take whatever means necessary to fulfill the demands of his trade, regardless of their relationship, or the cost to the other. Sherlock displays the "rarest of all human qualities,"¹ in that he treats everyone fairly and equally, although he treats few kindly.

The idea of "whatever means necessary," or consequentialism, is frequently embraced by Sherlock Holmes, but, unfortunately, has vast consequences when abused. In both "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," and "A Scandal in Bohemia," Holmes assumes a persona in order to trick a woman into giving him information. In the latter, Sherlock impersonates a clergyman, in order to trick Irene Adler into letting him into her house and eventually forcing her to reveal her secret. Despite this manipulation, the reader cannot help but empathize with the sleuth, as Adler is portrayed as the villain in the story. The situation is quite different in "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," where Holmes plays the role of a plumber, meanwhile orchestrating an elaborate plot to steal information. In this scenario, the reader's sympathies incline toward the maid. The main difference in these situations is the status of the women; one, a poor maid, portrayed as a victim, and the other, a wealthy upper-class socialite, villainized in the tale. Despite these differences, Sherlock Holmes' actions were emotionally manipulative towards both. Through this example, we notice Holmes' second enigma: the detective's greatest strength – consistency – is also his greatest weakness. In both situations, Sherlock acts "for the greater good" – the putative best outcome for the largest number of people – and in doing so, emotionally injures two people. This is the issue with utilitarianism; to help the most people, one must be willing to injure others for the perceived greater good. In such thinking, we observe the difference between Holmes and Watson; Holmes, a statistical thinker not prone to emotional connection, adheres strictly to both utilitarianism and consequentialism, while Watson, a doctor, takes a more deontological approach. In order to fulfill his commitment to his clients, Holmes made an immoral decision that Watson could not condone. This vast difference between Holmes' and Watson's philosophies is precisely what makes them such wonderful partners.



Utilitarianism wills one to turn a blind eye to injustice; to excuse Holmes' behavior, the reader must view people as pawns in the game for greater good. It is morally



acceptable to save a relationship from a blackmailer; however, when one considers the cost – ruining another relationship – the action becomes significantly less tolerable. In the context of these stories, it was inadmissible to manipulate women as Holmes did. As Watson states in “A Scandal in Bohemia,” “All emotions...were abhorrent to his [Sherlock Holmes'] cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind. He was...the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen.”(5) As a deductive thinker, Holmes was inerrant. As a person, Holmes was incapable of emotion. This distinction defines Holmes' personality

and informs his decisions. Although his manipulation of people was inexcusable, and his glorification of logic over emotion inadvisable, Holmes will always stand as the greatest detective ever to grace the page.

Endnotes

- 1) “IPML Chapter 1, Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*,” www.laits.utexas.edu, n.d., <https://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/bentham/ipml/ipml.c01.html>.
- 2) Dr. Laura D'Olimpio, “Big Thinker: Who Was Jeremy Bentham?,” THE ETHICS CENTRE, July 25, 2019, <https://ethics.org.au/big-thinker-jeremy-bentham/>.
- 3) Larry Alexander and Michael Moore, “Deontological Ethics,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2007, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/>.
- 4) Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. 7 (New York: Book-Of-The-Month Club, 1994), 195.
- 5) Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1994), 3.

Justice Or Lawfulness—Holmes' Logical Choice

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"I follow my own methods, and tell as much or as little as I choose. That is the advantage of being unofficial," Holmes testifies in "Silver Blaze". As an independent consulting detective, Holmes is in a unique position—because he is unaffiliated with the authorities or the pathetic incompetence of the Scotland Yard "detectives," save occasional cooperation to stop the more dangerous criminal, he has no obligation to strictly and obstinately follow the law. Indeed, in several of Watson's accounts, Holmes deliberately, yet conscientiously, breaks the law. However, Holmes' dangerous and illegal actions are justified when they prevent the disappointment of a client, the disgrace of a female, or the deficiency of knowledge.

Holmes is fiercely loyal to his clients, provided he deems their character virtuous. In "A Scandal in Bohemia", once Holmes commits to accepting the King's case, he will stop at nothing to bring the downfall of Adler and the triumph of his client, even if that necessitates marginal breaking of the law. Watson reluctantly agrees to illegal conduct "in a good cause" and Holmes convincingly assures him that "the cause is excellent" indeed. To Holmes, ever logical, the matter requires but a simple application of cost-benefit analysis. The cost of breaking the law is inconsequential compared to the benefit gained: the righteous victory of his client over some foul villain, and in some cases, the prevention of a more severe crime. Furthermore, Holmes' unwavering devotion to his client drives his compulsion to persistently take every action necessary for the eventual success of the case. Ultimately faced with defeat by Adler, Holmes despairs, sorrowfully apologizing to the King that he could not "bring [his] majesty's business to a more successful conclusion." Holmes' remorse over this single unsuccessful consultation demonstrates that the failure affects him deeply. Readers sympathize with Holmes and admire his devoted allegiance and faithfulness to his



clientele. Once committed, Holmes will stop at nothing to succeed, routinely putting forth his finest effort to help his clients and is shamelessly unopposed to breaking the law to prevail.

While the prosperity of his clients is always Holmes' top priority, as a gentleman, he never hesitates to put forth a similarly valiant effort to render justice to oppressed females, whether they be his client or not. His chivalrous desire to restore honor to women harmed by dastardly scoundrels often places him in situations where he must choose the lesser of two evils—to judiciously break the law rather than to allow an injustice to go unpunished. In “Charles Augustus Milverton”, Watson describes his shame after breaking and entering and becoming “felons in the eyes of the law,” yet only a few moments later is thrilled that they are once again “defenders of the law instead of its defiers.” He recounts his initial apprehension of breaking the law to enter Milverton's lair but is soon satisfied as he realizes that the justice they are bringing to a persecuted female warrants their illegal actions since the law had failed to bring about justice in the first place. Moreover, when Holmes and Watson witness an outraged female victim commit Milverton's murder, undeniably a felony in the eyes of the law, Holmes refuses to alert authorities, rationalizing the brazen omission by explaining that in certain situations illegal actions are appropriate and indeed imperative if legal actions were ineffective in delivering justice to the exploited. “I think there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch... [and] justify private revenge,” Holmes elucidates to Watson. According to Newton's third law, “Every action has an equal and opposite reaction;”



therefore, if criminals act above the law, one must follow suit and play by the criminals' cards to prevail. By this logic, Holmes believes that he and Watson must, on occasion, take the law into their own hands, elevating justice over lawfulness.

In the same way that he steadfastly seeks justice, Holmes likewise idolizes the tenacious pursuit of knowledge and truth. His strictly logical reasoning propels him to track truth as earnestly as he tracks footprints and, consequently, in ways that often lead him to inadvertently jeopardize his own safety. In “The Devil's Foot”, Holmes participates in a dangerous experiment to confirm unquestionably his “working hypothesis.” While the experiment is somewhat perilous, Holmes, as always, has already carefully weighed the cost to the potential benefit, decisively progressing with the enterprise because, to him, the advantage of confirming his hypothesis is worth the risk of potential harm. He prudently takes the reasonable precautions of opening the window to reduce the effect of the poison as well as asking Watson to join him for protection.

Additionally, Holmes undertakes this experiment independently of legal authorities, deliberately leaving all evidence undisturbed. “It is not for me, my dear Watson, to stand in the way of the official police force,” Holmes remarks. “I leave them all the evidence which I found . . . had they the wit to find it.” Thus, his philosophy gives the police the opportunity to solve the crime themselves, yet Holmes simultaneously manages to conduct the conclusive experiment on his own, concretely proving his theory and definitively resolving the case. Though perhaps some might argue that his experiment was reckless and hazardous, by taking the necessary precautions, Holmes heroically triumphs, incessantly pursuing knowledge and veracity.



In his relentless quest to run a successful and reliable consulting detective business, to bring justice to oppressed and desperate women, and to unfailingly uncover the precise truth, Holmes will unhesitatingly break the law or take dangerous action when the necessity arises. As Holmes explained so eloquently in “Silver Blaze”, he independently follows his own methods, invariably thinking and acting critically, intelligently, shrewdly. Certainly, this separation from the law works to his advantage, and London, therefore, is lucky that Holmes chooses to use his powers for the public good. Perhaps best summed up by Inspector Gregson in “The Greek Interpreter”, “It is a mercy that you are on the side of the force, and not against it, Mr. Holmes.”

