

CORRESPONDENCE

From Watson's Tin Box Of Ellicott City for a Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for Seventh Graders

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PROPOSAL TO THE HOWARD COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

From Watson's Tin Box Of Ellicott City for a Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for Seventh Graders

Summary

Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City submits this proposal to the Howard County School System Middle Schools for the sponsorship of an essay contest in the academic year 2004-2005. The goals of the essay contest are to encourage children:

1. to read,
2. to obtain exposure to Sherlock Holmes,
3. to both enjoy the story and think critically about it, and
4. to write an analytical five paragraph essay about the story.

The essay contest will target Seventh Graders. It will be held during either the first or second half of the academic year, depending on the preference of the School System. It will involve students reading the Sherlock Holmes short story *The Speckled Band* and writing a five-paragraph analytical essay. To assist the students, Watson's Tin Box will develop a booklet that includes the story, pre-reading activities, a glossary of British terms, essay questions, and the rubric which will be used in judging the essays. Each teacher who chooses to have his/her class participate will forward to Watson's Tin Box the top two essays from each of his/her classes. The Howard County Public Library will make participation in the essay contest available to private and home-schooled children. Children submitting essays through the Library will forward the essay directly to Watson's Tin Box. Children who submit an essay through the School System will compete along with children who submit an essay through the Library. Watson's Tin Box will review all of the essays they receive and will award a First, Second, and Third Prize to the three best essays.

Watson 's Tin Box

Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City, a "Scion Society" of the Baker Street Irregulars, is a literary society that focuses on the writings of Arthur Conan Doyle - primarily his Sherlock Holmes stories. It was founded in 1990 and has held monthly dinner meetings ever since. Each month, approximately fifteen Tin Box members discuss a different Sherlock Holmes story. At most gatherings, a member presents a "scholarly paper" or some other type of presentation that raises issues or elucidates various facts that can be found in one or more stories. Tin Box members include educators, authors, health care professionals, business people, government employees, and retirees.

The Baker Street Irregulars ("BSI") is the premier international literary society concentrating on Sherlock Holmes. It grew out of the roundtable luncheons of the early 1930s, but was officially started by the author and essayist Christopher Morley in 1934. The membership quickly grew to include business people, educators, and others. In 1946, the BSI started a magazine called the *Baker Street Journal* in which analytical Sherlockian articles are published. *The Journal* has published four issues a year since 1946 (except for a brief hiatus in 1950). Critical thinking has always been a hallmark of the Sherlockian world.

Today, the BSI includes more than 300 men and women from around the world. It still

meets in New York City every January. Members include writers, ambassadors, teachers, actors, judges, business people, and many others. Not all Sherlockians are members of the BSI (though several members of Watson's Tin Box are). Usually, people are "invested" as members after significant accomplishments in Sherlockian writings or in other areas. However, one does not have to be a BSI member to get together with other Sherlockians. There are hundreds of local Sherlock Holmes societies all over the world. Watson's Tin Box is one of them.

Details of the Essay Contest

Watson's Tin Box conceived of the idea of the essay contest and approached the Howard County Library to determine the Library's interest in collaborating on the project. The Library invited Ms. Sharon Stein, the Middle School Reading Specialist, to join in a planning meeting. The Library has informed the Tin Box that it will collaborate on the essay project, making participation available to private and home-schooled children if the School System makes it available to public school students. The contest will be held entirely through the Library for all children if the School System does not choose to participate.

Watson's Tin Box will develop a booklet to assist the students. At present, the contents of the booklet include:

1. Acknowledgements
2. Introduction
3. Essay Contest Rules
4. The Story, "*The Adventure of the Speckled Band*"
5. A Dictionary of British terms used in the story
6. A Reader's Guide with guiding questions
7. Pre-reading activities
8. Reading Approach
9. Post-reading activities
10. Essay Writing Tips
11. Essay Questions
12. Essay Judging Rubric

Watson's Tin Box has been very fortunate that Cathy Schorreck, an Eighth Grade English teacher and Head of the Middle School English Department at the McDonogh School, has taken an interest in our initiative and has assisted us in developing the material for the booklet.

The copyright for the *Speckled Band* has expired, and the story is in the public domain and may be published without license, approval, or royalty. Nevertheless, The Tin Box has sought and received permission from Jon Lellenberg, the American representative of the Conan Doyle Estate.

At the beginning of the contest, individual Tin Box members are willing to make a limited number of visits to schools to help "kick off" the contest. Tin Box members are capable of speaking to students about Sherlock Holmes.

Seventh Grade teachers in the School System who choose to participate will enable

their students to participate in the contest. Each teacher will forward to the Tin Box the top two essays in each of his/her classes. The Howard County Public Library will make contest participation available to private and home-schooled children. Children participating through the Library will mail their essays directly to the Tin Box. The Tin Box will choose a First, Second, and Third Prize winner from all of the essays that it reviews. Children who submit an essay through the School System will compete along with children who submit an essay through the Library.

Essay Contest Rules

The proposed essay contest rules are:

1. This contest is targeting students at the Seventh Grade level.
2. Parents and teachers may not write or edit the essay for entrants. These essays should be entirely the work of the Seventh Graders.
3. Essays must include a cover sheet with the following information:
 - a. The student's name
 - b. The grade level
 - c. Age
 - d. Home Address
 - e. Phone number
 - f. Sponsoring teacher's name (if entering via the Library, please still identify your teacher)
 - g. School name (home-schooled students may just indicate such)
 - h. School address.
4. An official entry form will be included in the booklet. A student should photocopy the entry form and staple it to the front of his/her essay. *Essays received by Watson's Tin Box without a stapled cover sheet will not be read and will not be eligible for prizes.*
5. The essay should be 5 paragraphs long. If the student wishes to include an additional paragraph or two, he/she may.
6. Essays are to be written in English, word-processed, 12-point font size, double-spaced. All pages must be stapled together.
7. Essay questions will be provided to the students in the booklet. Students may be directed by a teacher to answer one of these questions or may, after consulting with a teacher or parent, choose to discuss a well-defined issue that catches their interest.
8. A rubric identifying the criteria by which essays will be judged will be included in the booklet. Contestants may want to review the rubric before they begin their essays.
9. Teachers may submit no more than two essays per class to the Tin Box

for final judging.

10. Essays must be received by Watson's Tin Box, in care of 5612 Thicket Lane, Columbia, MD 21044, no later than _____ (to be determined based on when the School System prefers the contest to occur) _____ to be eligible for the prizes.
11. Essays received by Watson's Tin Box will not be returned to the student or the teacher.

Prizes

The First Prize Winner will receive a \$50 gift card to a local bookstore. In addition, s/he will receive a certificate from Watson's Tin Box and will have his/her essay published in the next publication of *Irene's Cabinet*, a sporadic publication of the Tin Box.

The Second and Third Prize Winners will receive \$25 gift cards to a local bookstore and certificates from Watson's Tin Box.

It is suggested that the prizes be awarded at an Evening with Sherlock Holmes program that Watson's Tin Box would hold at the Howard County Public Library at the end of the contest.

Costs

The Tin Box anticipates that the production cost of the booklet will be approximately \$2.00 per copy. Depending on the preference of the School System, we will distribute one copy to each student or only to each participating teacher. The size of the distribution (and, therefore, the cost of production) will determine if the Tin Box funds the production internally or will solicit funds from other sources for production of the booklet. No child will be charged for the booklet. In addition, Watson's Tin box will make the booklet contents available on the Internet.

The Tin Box will solicit Border's Books and Music, Barnes and Noble Books, and/or other similar vendors for gift cards for prizes. If we are unsuccessful in our solicitations, Tin Box members will fund the prizes themselves.

The Rubric

Watson's Tin Box will use the attached rubric to judge the essays. This rubric was developed in collaboration with Ms. Cathy Schorreck, an Eighth Grade English teacher and Head of the Middle School English Department at the McDonogh School, and adapted from rubrics in *Literature and Language Arts - Discovering Literature - Writing Resources*, EMC Paradigm Publishing, St. Paul, MN, 2001.

Watson's Tin Box looks forward to collaborating with the Howard County School System and the Howard County Public library on this initiative.

Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City holds the copyright for content in this proposal. The content of this proposal may not be reproduced for any purpose other than the 2004-2005 Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest without the express, written permission of Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City.

Submitted on behalf of Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City, a Scion Society of the Baker Street Irregulars, by:

Andrew L. Solberg

Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest

Rubric for Judging the Essays

Criteria	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	SCORE
Originality of Thought	The essay raises very thoughtful interpretations of the story that are well supported.	The essay raises interpretations of the story that are supported.	The essay offers little insight, and ideas are not supported	The essay offers no thoughtful interpretations	
Logic	There is an accurate and effective analysis of the topic.	There are gaps in the analysis of the topic. Textual evidence is used.	The analysis of the topic is ineffective. There is little textual	There is no analysis of the topic. No textual evidence is	
Coherence	All ideas are presented in a clear and effective order. Transitions between ideas are natural and	Most of the ideas follow a logical progression. There is an attempt to create transitions	The ideas in the essay are hard to follow. No transitions between ideas are used.	There is no attempt to organize the ideas within the essay.	
Unity	All ideas relate to the topic of the essay.	Most of the ideas are related to the topic of the essay.	There are unrelated ideas that interrupt the flow of the essay.	The number of unrelated ideas within the essay creates so much confusion that the	
Tone	The writer maintains a formal, objective tone throughout the essay.	The writer attempts to maintain a formal, objective tone, making only minor errors.	The writer uses an informal subjective tone	The writer demonstrates little to no audience awareness	
Diction	The writer's word choice is precise, natural, and reflects a good	The writer's word choice is precise.	The writer's word choice creates confusion and feels forced or	The writer's word choice reflects a lack of familiarity with language.	
Conventions	There are no grammatical, mechanical, punctuation, or spelling errors.	There are only a few grammatical, mechanical, punctuation, or spelling errors.	Grammatical, mechanical, punctuation, or spelling errors interrupt the flow of the work.	Grammatical, mechanical, punctuation, or spelling errors make the essay unreadable.	

TO BARNES & NOBLE BOOKSELLERS

Submitted by Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City
Describing the Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest
for Seventh Graders

Summary

Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City is pleased to submit to Barnes & Noble Booksellers this description of its Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest that is to occur in this academic year. The Essay Contest has been approved by both the Howard County Library and the Howard County School System. The goals of the essay contest are to encourage children:

1. to read,
2. to obtain exposure to Sherlock Holmes,
3. to both enjoy the story and think critically about it, and
4. to write an analytical five paragraph essay about the story.

Also, hopefully, they will become lifelong customers of Barnes & Noble Booksellers. The essay contest will target Seventh Graders. It will "kick-off" on January 6, 2005, and the winners will be announced in early April. It will involve students reading the Sherlock Holmes short story *The Speckled Band* and writing a five paragraph analytical essay. To assist the students, Watson's Tin Box has developed a booklet that includes the story, pre-reading activities, a glossary of British terms, essay questions, and the rubric which will be used in judging the essays. The teachers have requested that Watson's Tin Box provide to each of them three copies of the booklet, which they will reproduce and distribute to the students. The booklet has a page for acknowledging our appreciation of those who have collaborated in making the essay contest a reality. As Barnes & Noble Booksellers has agreed to partner with the Tin Box, Barnes & Noble will be given special acknowledgement within the booklet.

The teachers have requested that we provide them with the booklets on or about October 1, 2004. Therefore, in order to allow adequate time for adding Barnes & Noble Booksellers' name to the acknowledgements in the booklet, printing, and distribution, the Tin Box appreciates the timely response you gave.

Each teacher who chooses to have his/her class participate will forward to Watson's Tin Box the top two essays from each of his/her classes. The Howard County Public Library will make participation in the essay contest available to private and home-schooled children. Children submitting essays through the Library will forward the essay directly to Watson's Tin Box. Children who submit an essay through the School System will compete along with children who submit an essay through the Library. Watson's Tin Box will review all of the essays they receive and will award a First (\$50 Gift Card), Second (\$25 Gift Card), and Third Prize (\$25 Gift Card) to the three best essays.

Approximately thirty teachers have said that they will have their classes participate in the contest. As each teacher has more than one class, and each class has 25-30 students, and additional students will be participating through the Library, Watson's Tin Box estimates that between 2,500 and 3,000 students will participate.

Watson's Tin Box

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The Baker Street Irregulars ("BSI") is the premier international literary society concentrating on Sherlock Holmes. It grew out of the roundtable luncheons of the early 1930s, but was officially started by the author and essayist Christopher Morley in 1934. The membership quickly grew to include business people, educators, and others. In 1946, the BSI started a magazine called the *Baker Street Journal* in which analytical Sherlockian articles are published. *The Journal* has published four issues a year since 1946 (except for a brief hiatus in 1950). Critical thinking has always been a hallmark of the Sherlockian world.

Today, the BSI includes more than 300 men and women from around the world. It still meets in New York City every January. Members include writers, ambassadors, teachers, actors, judges, business people, and many others. Not all Sherlockians are members of the BSI (though several members of Watson's Tin Box are). Usually, people are "invested" as members after significant accomplishments in Sherlockian writings or in other areas. However, one does not have to be a BSI member to get together with other Sherlockians. There are hundreds of local Sherlock Holmes societies all over the world. Watson's Tin Box is one of them.

Costs

The Tin Box anticipates that the production cost of the booklet for the Essay Contest will be approximately \$1.70 per copy. No child will be charged for the booklet. In addition, through the Howard County Library, Watson's Tin box will make the booklet contents available on the Internet.

Projected Budget

Schools

Class Copies 1 booklet X \$1.70 X 30 =	\$ 51
2 Printouts (non-booklet version) X \$1.70 X 30 =	\$102
Postage (Mailing the booklet to teachers) 30 X \$2.00	\$ 60
	\$170

Library

100 Booklets X \$1.70 =	
Additional Copies of Booklet 25 Booklets X \$1.70	\$ 43
Prizes (Gift Cards)	\$100
(Framed Certificates)	\$ 60

Postage for Mailing Results	\$ 15
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Total	\$601
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The Tin Box is delighted and grateful that Barnes & Noble Booksellers has decided to partner with us by sharing the costs of this project. Watson's Tin Box has already expended many hours meeting with School and Library officials, developing the booklet, and meeting with teachers. We have also paid for the printing of prototype booklets. We will spend many more hours meeting with classes and reading essays. We hope to forge a long-term relationship with Barnes & Noble so that we can assure the School System and the Library that the contest can become an annual event.

Submitted on behalf of Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City, a Scion Society of the Baker Street Irregulars, by:

Andrew L. Solberg

Letter to the Thirty Public School Teachers who Attended the August Organizational Meeting on the Contest

September 20, 2004

<<Name>>

<<Address>>

<<City>>

RE: Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for Seventh Graders

Dear <<Dear>>:

Thank you for your interest in participating in the 2004-2005 Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for seventh graders. In response to the request of the participating teachers at the August 25, 2004 meeting, I am providing you with two printouts of the booklet in a format that is easily reproducible. You may decide what material from the booklet you want to provide to your students.

Please read the contest rules carefully. Please remember that you will be forwarding to us *only the two best essays* in each of your classes. Each entry must have stapled to it an Essay Contest Entry Form, which can be found on the last page of the enclosed material.

Remember that the formal “kick-off” of the Contest is January 6, 2005. All essays must be received by March 5th. We will announce the winner on or about April 6th, which happens to be the anniversary of the date that Sherlockian chronologists estimate when the Adventure of the Speckled Band actually occurred. The Howard County Library will be making the contest available to private and home school children. All students will be competing against each other.

Again, thank you for choosing to have your classes participate in the contest. We look forward to reading the essays.

Best,

Letter to the Private Schools

Your Seventh Grade students are invited to participate in a Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest that is to begin on January 6, 2005. The Essay Contest is being held in partnership with Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City (a Sherlock Holmes Society), the Howard County Library, and the Howard County School System.

The essay contest will target Seventh Graders. It will involve students reading the Sherlock Holmes short story *The Speckled Band* and writing a five paragraph analytical essay. Each teacher in either public or private schools who chooses to have his/her class participate will forward to Watson's Tin Box the *top two essays* from his/her class. The Howard County Public Library is also making participation in the essay contest available to individual private and home-schooled children. All of the children will be competing against each other. The essays must be received by Watson's Tin Box by March 5, 2005. Watson's Tin Box will review all of the essays they receive and will award a First (\$50 Gift Card), Second (\$25 Gift Card), and Third Prize (\$25 Gift Card) to the three best essays. The winners of the Essay Contest will be announced on or about April 6th.

To assist the students, Watson's Tin Box has developed a booklet that includes the story, pre-reading activities, a glossary of British terms, *specific essay questions*, the rubric which will be used in judging the essays and a *contest entry form*. Copies of this booklet will be available at branches of the Howard County library and also will be posted on the Howard County Library Website (<http://www.howa.lib.md.us/>) for download and reproduction. Teachers may decide how much of the material from the booklet they want to provide to their students.

Please do not have students who are working at a level above Seventh Grade English submit an essay. We want to have a fair competition among children of common capabilities.

Watson's Tin Box

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hallmark of the Sherlockian world.

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For more information about the contest, you may email Andrew L. Solberg at xxx

Letter to the Home School Organizations

Your students who are working at the Seventh Grade level are invited to participate in a Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest that is to begin on January 6, 2005. The Essay Contest is being held in partnership with Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City (a Sherlock Holmes Society), the Howard County Library, the Howard County School System, and Barnes & Noble Booksellers of Ellicott City.

The essay contest will target Seventh Graders. It will involve students reading the Sherlock Holmes short story *The Speckled Band* and writing a five paragraph analytical essay. Teacher in either public or private schools who chooses to have his/her class participate will forward to Watson's Tin Box the *top two essays* from his/her class. Home school children will forward their essays directly to Watson's Tin Box. All of the children will be competing against each other. The essays must be received by Watson's Tin Box by March 5, 2005. Watson's Tin Box will review all of the essays they receive and will award a First (\$50 Gift Card to Barnes & Noble), Second (\$25 Gift Card), and Third Prize (\$25 Gift Card) to the three best essays. The winners of the Essay Contest will be announced on or about April 6th.

To assist the students, Watson's Tin Box has developed a booklet that includes the story, pre-reading activities, a glossary of British terms, *specific essay questions*, the rubric which will be used in judging the essays and a *contest entry form*. Copies of this booklet will be available at branches of the Howard County library and also will be posted on the Howard County Library Website (<http://www.howa.lib.md.us/>) for download and reproduction. Teachers may decide how much of the material from the booklet they want to provide to their students.

Please *do not* have students who are working at a level above Seventh Grade English submit an essay. We want to have a fair competition among children of common capabilities.

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This contest is being funded by Barnes & Noble Booksellers of Ellicott City.

For more information about the contest, you may email Andrew L. Solberg at xxx

Letter Sent to the Contest Entrants Announcing the Winners

March 29, 2005

<<Name>>

<<Address>>

<<City>>

Dear <<Dear>>:

Thank you so much for participating in the 2005 Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for seventh graders. We hope that you enjoyed reading Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*. We want to congratulate all of the entrants, as the essays were well done and refreshing to read. In judging the essays, we adhered to the Rubric that was included in the essay packet. The essays were all well done, but we were able to distinguish the First, Second, and Third Prize essays. We are proud to announce that these entrants are:

First Prize - Name

Second Prize - Name

Third Prize - Name

Special congratulations go to these students. However, as all of the other essays were also of high quality, Watson's Tin Box will award certificates of Honorable Mention to the other entrants. The awards and certificates will be bestowed at a program at the East Columbia Library, 6600 Cradlerock Way, Columbia, MD 21045 on Thursday, April 14th, 7:30-8:30 pm. Those entrants who would like to receive an Honorable Mention Certificate must receive them at this program. In addition, the program includes a fun quiz (with prizes), and presentations from Mr. Holmes and other Sherlockians.

We hope that throughout the rest of your life you feel the interest to return to Sherlock Holmes from time to time and enjoy the fun of hearing Holmes say to Watson, "The game is afoot." There is a worldwide community of people who love Sherlock Holmes. If your interest in Holmes continues, feel free to join in. Congratulations on your essay. I hope to meet you on April 14th.

Best,

Cover Letter to the Teachers Accompanying the Evaluation Survey

April 26, 2005

<<Name>>

<<Company>>

<<Address>>

<<City>>

RE: Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for Seventh Graders

Dear <<Dear>>:

Last August, you expressed an interest in having your classes participate in the 2004- 2005 Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for seventh graders. We received terrific essays, judged them according to the rubric we included in the Contest booklet, and bestowed the prizes on the top three winners at a program at the Howard County Library. We even gave Honorable Mention Certificates to the entrants whose essays were not among the top three. For the first year, it was a wonderful success. We have already submitted a proposal to the Howard County School System to do it again next year.

To that end, we would appreciate some feedback from you on this year's Contest (*even if you did not participate*), so we can make some improvements for next year. (We know about the typos in the story in the booklet, and we have corrected them already.) Should the deadline be later in the year? Did the classes like the *Speckled Band*? Was it a good teaching tool? Please take the time to fill out the attached survey. There are only 9 questions (front and back of 1 page). We are even including postage paid envelopes. *Even if you did not have your class read the story or submit essays*, we would like to know what changed your mind between August and March and whether you would consider participating next year.

We really appreciate the role that the teachers played in making this year's contest a success. Thank you for taking the time to fill out the survey. We look forward to next year's contest. If you have any questions or would like to make any other comments, please feel free to e-mail me.

Best,

**SHERLOCK HOLMES ESSAY CONTEST
FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION SURVEY**

Please circle the most appropriate responses. Feel free to add comments, even if space is not provided for them.

1. I had ____ classes read *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*.
 - a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3

2. There were approximately ____ students in each of the classes.
 - e. 10
 - f. 15
 - g. 20
 - h. 25
 - i. 30
 - j. 35

3. If you had the students read the story and write essays, did you submit the essays as part of the essay contest?
 - k. Yes
 - l. No

4. If you had the students read the story, but you did not submit the two best essays as part of the contest, which answer best explains why you did not?
 - m. I fell behind in my lesson plans and had the students read the story after the contest had ended.
 - n. My students' essays were not high enough quality.
 - o. We read the story in/for class but did not do the essay.
 - p. Other (Please explain.)

5. If you did not have the students read the story, which answer best explains why?
 - q. I decided that the story was not appropriate for my class.
 - r. I decided that participating in the contest was not consistent with my lesson plans.
 - s. I fell behind in my lesson plans, and something had to be eliminated.
 - t. I lost interest in having them read *The Speckled Band*.
 - u. e. Other (Please explain.)

6. If you had your class read the *Speckled Band*, was it a good choice for teaching the students how to analyze a short story and write an essay?

- a. Yes
- b. No (Please explain)

7. Did you find the “booklet” that we developed in conjunction with the contest useful?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. c. Don't know

8. Whether you had your class read the story this year or not, would you be interested in having your next year's class read the *Speckled Band* and write critical essays?

- d. Yes
- e. No

9. How could we improve the contest?

- f. Hold it later in the academic year
- g. Chose a different Sherlock Holmes story
- h. Other (Please explain)

Name (optional) _____

Thank you for participating in the survey. Please mail it to xxx