*"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."*

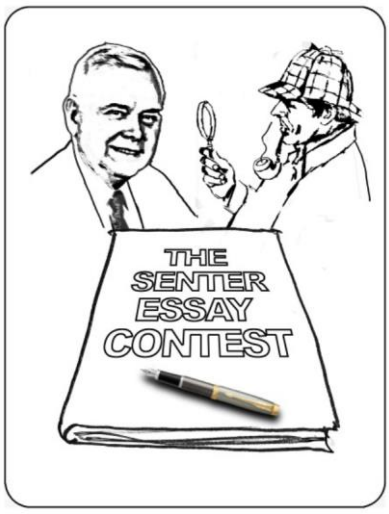
# THE BEACON SOCIETY

**The Not-So-Quarterly Newsletter**
**(In our world, being irregular is a virtue)**
**VOLUME 8, NUMBER 2 – June, 2024**

## From the Desk of the Head-Light

## "Light-houses, my boy! Beacons of the future!"

We are all familiar with Sherlock Holmes's quote describing the board-schools to Watson in "The Naval Treaty," but it's just as appropriate to describe this year's award winners of The Joel R. Senter Essay Contest with it as well. An amazing set of essays are now available for everyone's enjoyment, and we have attached them to the end of this newsletter for easy access. Two elementary-aged students, three middle school students, and three high schoolers have written perspectives on Sherlock Holmes that are worth reading.



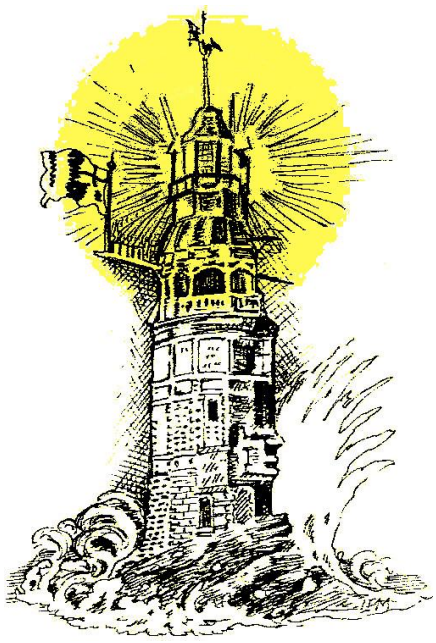

The 10th-12th grade submissions tackled topics of justice and morality. Thomas Hebert's analysis of Holmes's moral ambiguity in relation to justice, Alexandra Thomas's assessment of actions taken during "Charles Augustus Milverton," and Ryan Foley's examination of John Locke's principles of truth and justice in "A Scandal in Bohemia" could all stand next to many scholarly essays by senior Sherlockians.

The 7th-9th grade winners include Kingston Loehre penning a letter of friendship from Holmes to Watson, Cecilia Goedde imagining how a reporter would react to learning the truth behind "The Abbey Grange," and Madeline Mozlin envisioning how a Sherlockian apprenticeship might begin.

The recipients in the 4th-6th grade category brought us two great pieces as well. Juliana Foley makes an analysis of the mood in "The Speckled Band" and Meghna Shanmugan connects Sherlock Holmes's methods to those of Joseph Bell and Albert Einstein.

Holmes's quote from the beginning of this newsletter continues with "Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wise, better England of the future." If this year's Joel R. Senter essay contest winners are any indication, I think it's safe to say the future of Sherlockiana will have a wise and better future as well.

# Rob Nunn



# Student Perspectives on Sherlock Holmes

## The 2024 R. Joel Senter Memorial Essay Contest Prize Winners

***Sponsored by***
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# Student Perspectives on Sherlock Holmes

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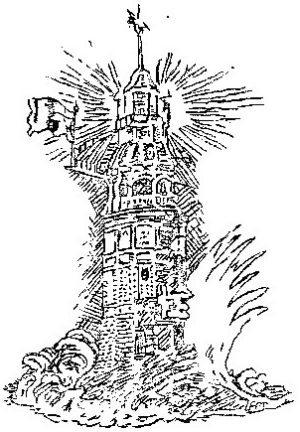

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**Compiled by Stephen Mason,**
**Communications Committee, The Beacon Society**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


R. Joel Senter . . . . . 4

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle . . . . . 6

**4th – 6th Grade**

Julianna Foley (1st Place) . . . . . 7

Meghna Shanmugan (2nd Place) . . . . . 9

**7th – 9th Grade**

Kingston Loehrer (1st Place) . . . . . 11

Cecelia Goedde (2nd Place) . . . . . 13

Madeline Mozlin (3rd Place) . . . . . 15

**10th -- 12th Grade**

Thomas Hébert (1st Place) . . . . . 17

Alexandra Thomas (2nd Place) . . . . . 20

Ryan Foley (3rd Place) . . . . . 22

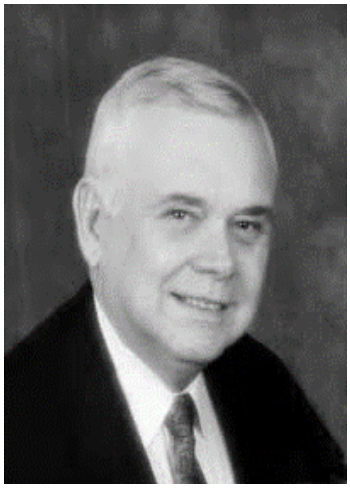


With thanks and gratitude to Carolyn Senter and the Joel Senter Memorial Essay Awards Committee:

Deborah Clark
Francine Kitts
Ann Kimbrough
David Mac Gregor

Ann Brauer Andriacco -- Chair, Awards Committee

# R. Joel Senter



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

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

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

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

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

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

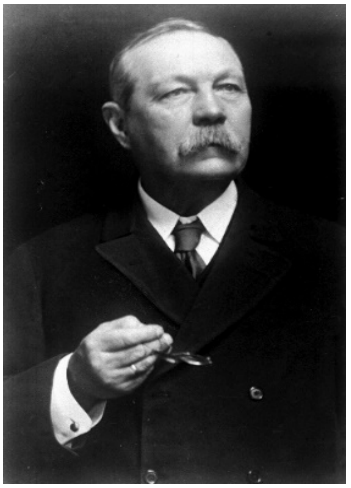
Joel was fond of quoting a professor of his who said, "He who toots not his own horn, so shall it not be tooted." But, as Carolyn pointed out, "he never followed his own advice and, indeed, even eschewed his own accomplishments."

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***

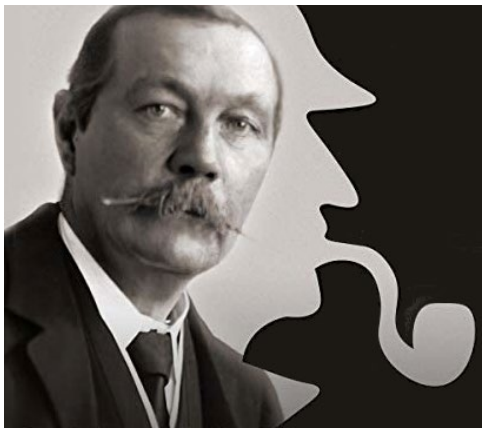
# *ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE*

***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



# The Grim Mood of "The Adventure of the Speckled Band"

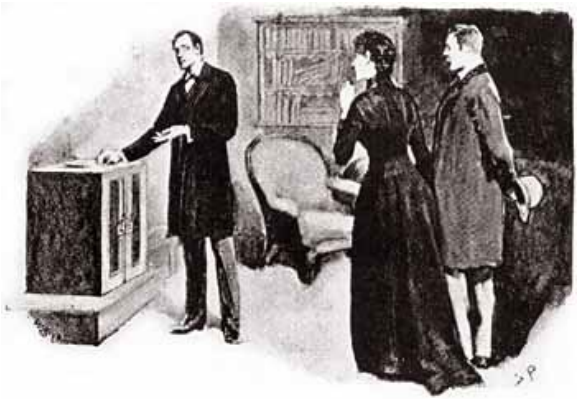
## Juliana Foley, 1st Prize
## 4th – 6th Grade

After reading "The Adventure of the Speckled Band", I think that the setting plays an important part in this story of mystery and action. The details and specifics of the dreadful setting allow the reader to fully imagine what is happening in the tale of Mr. Holmes and Watson. It helped me register and think about the story's twist and turns. The environment, with its dark and mysterious feel, helps put a mood in your mind.

Some examples of the condition of their house are how Dr. Roylott lets the animals roam free in the darkness, how it is in a remote area, and how you can feel the mansion being overgrown with vines and weeds galore. The inside is described as bare, with few decorations that make the house feel like a home. The gypsies living on the land makes it feel less comfortable, too. Imagine hearing laughter creeping up from the hills, slowly making its way toward your house to reach your open bedroom window. The cackles and giggles dancing in the air around you, making sleep impossible as you dream the worst. Witches, gremlins, goblins, or maybe a leprechaun. The grinning little face with beady eyes, blushing red cheeks, and the teeth. The cold, sharp teeth shining in the moonlight. I couldn't imagine dealing with that strange laughter. The atmosphere of Dr. Roylott's residence seems heavy, as if you can sense there has been death in the household, and that death will come.

Another example of the setting contributing to this is the ominous feeling in the environment. The big bars on the windows feel as if Ms. Stoner is locked in, which goes as she could have been a victim of death. The weather really has an impact on the terrain and atmosphere. The howling wind and heavy rain make this feel as if destruction has been here - and will be here. The only light you can see so far is the gray

hair on Ms. Stoner's head. That Dr. Roylott feels the need to do this to his stepchildren is the worst of it all. He had it all planned out from the beginning of this twisted tale, as I can tell. You never know what will happen in the future. The near future, too.



As you can see, the darkness of the setting reflects the blackness of Dr. Roylott's heart. With the exotic animals roaming around, the gypsies' strange ways, the dread of Ms. Stoner, the stormy weather, and the thick bars on the locked window all contribute to the setting of "The Adventures of The Speckled Band". To me, setting is very important to the short narrative.

# The Methods of Sherlock Holmes

## Meghna Shanmugan, 2nd Prize
## 4th – 6th Grade

Sherlock Holmes uses methods to solve crimes that the London police don't typically think to do. What are Sherlock Holmes's methods for solving this mystery? Why do you think he behaves differently than the police?

**INTRODUCTION:**

An analysis of Holmes' methodology reveals a formidable and sequential combination of observation, deduction, meticulous planning, and execution, to decimate criminals. Holmes' scintillating observational skills derive from his prototype, Dr Joseph Bell - Doyle's teacher in medical school (1). His thought experiments resemble Einstein's thought experiments.

**MAIN STORY:**

HELEN INTERVIEW:

Holmes **observes** Helen's mud splattered jacket, and the train ticket, and **deduces** that she travelled by a dog cart and a train. *His observation facilitates the deduction*. Holmes notices the bruises, indicating that he cared. Holmes sought trivial details, which provide **him** a nuanced understanding of the problem.

ROYLOTT STANDOFF AND AUDIT:

Holmes was neither intimidated, nor provoked, by Roylott. Holmes bends the poker, demonstrating his physical strength. He audited Roylott's inheritance and discovered that he would have only £250 following both weddings, thereby establishing Roylott's motive.

HOLMES' THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS:

Holmes, like Einstein utilized mental models to investigate hypotheses and facilitate conclusions through deductive reasoning. Julia could smell Roylott's cigars in her room.

Holmes "experiments" on the train to Leatherhead, enabling him to *visualize* a ventilator, before setting foot in Stoke Moran.

STOKE MORAN:

Holmes initially attributed the whistling and the "speckled band" to the gypsies. *"It is a capital mistake to theorize without facts. There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact" – Doyle.* The windows, and all entrances and exits to the rooms were impenetrable. This enables Holmes to demolish the "gypsy hypothesis". This story belongs to the genre of a "locked room mystery, based on **Poe's** *"The Murders in the Rue Morgue."*

The third room was inconsequential. Holmes' focus and efficiency obviated the need to examine it.

The **presence** of the ventilator hole was obvious. Its unusual location between two rooms was not, except to Holmes. Holmes' *eyes saw what his mind knew.* He deciphered its significance.

The **presence** of the bellrope was obvious. Its **function** was not. Holmes rules out, its "obvious'' function to summon the housekeeper. Negative inferences help in refining a theory. Holmes recognizes that the new bellpull and the ventilator hole appeared simultaneously, allowing him to connect them.

Holmes thought of a snake, given Roylott's penchant for exotic Indian animals.

Holmes **observed** the "anchored" bed **and** determined, that it was specifically designed to remain immediately below the bellrope and the ventilator in a straight vertical path for the snake and ensure that the occupant would not sleep elsewhere.

In Roylott's room, the lash was obvious. The loop was not. Holmes determined that Roylott *stood* on the chair to direct the snake into the ventilator, after specifically deducing that a snake was entering through the ventilator. He surmised this in Julia's room, **before** entering Roylott's room. This is a thought experiment in real time.
PLANNING: Recognizing Roylott's strength, Holmes instructs Watson to carry his pistol. He meticulously, plans the entry into Julia's room and the ambush of the snake.

**CONCLUSION:**

Holmes' phenomenal success stems from his unique combination of mental and physical skillsets, which is spectacularly lacking in the police force.

**REFERENCES:**


1) **Meghna Shanmugam, Pallavi Shanmugam.** The Sherlockian Prototype. Dr. Joseph Bell. 80th Meeting of the Sherlock Holmes of Cape Fear, North Carolina. November 21, 2023.

# An Epistle of Acknowledgement for an Unparalleled Partnership

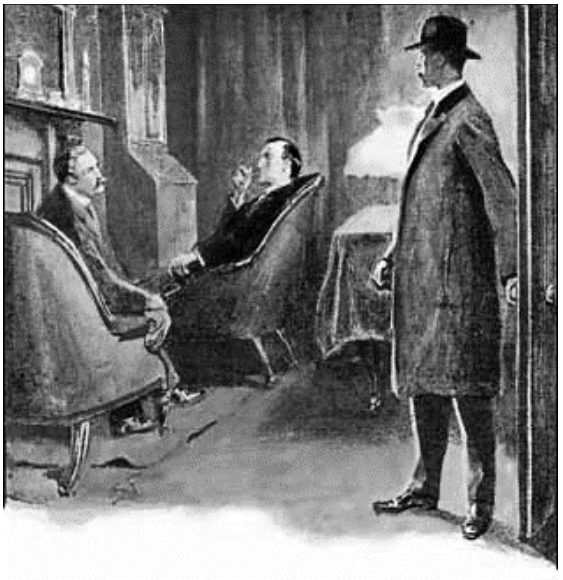
## Kingston Loehrer, 1st Prize
## 7th – 9th Grade

To my dear associate and friend, Dr. John Watson,

I have sent you this epistle to thank you for your unfaltering loyalty and camaraderie, as it was critical in the closure of our recent adventure and the discovery of our criminal, Mr. John Croker. I believe that presently I owe to uplift your ego a bit in reassuring you that your lesser intelligence and other contrasting qualities are by no means a detriment to me, but rather a great benefit. Though our mutual desires for the common good and an intellectual challenge united our operations in the first place, I reason that our differences have drawn out our fullest potential as a team and aided us most in our recent case. Allow me to briefly explain myself, doctor.

We, I find, were drawn together by our mutual motive: we are drawn to these cases, not for pecuniary gain, but for mere longing for the prevalence of the good. Take our most recent excursion with the late Lord Brackenstall and his unhappy wife for an example: we were engaged in this investigation with no desire for money (though we were working for one of the richest households in Kent), but because we merely desired to exercise our wit and comfort his melancholy wife. An inferior artist (as you know, I consider my profession one of the most gratifying forms of art) would have doubtless leapt as the apprehension of our unlucky perpetrator, as it would have guaranteed him wealth and fame among English society. We, however, acquitted the poor romantic of all charges because we understood it was right and just. Whereas others who are inferior to us are blinded to the good by the luster of their wealth, we are led to correct conclusions and decisions by our desire for justice.

Though commonalities certainly help make teamwork possible, our differing qualities must also be given due consideration. You and I possess very different mindsets: I have take up the art of deduction more so for the sake of intelligence than your adventure-based motivations, made obvious by those odious novels you have published (when I am an old man, I shall craft my guides for investigation: then we shall see why my approach to publication is superior). I also am not merely so deterred as you by intermediate inconveniences, as long as I arrive at the correct final conclusion. I was willing to gamble a bit on the location of the missing silver flatware and the identity of the sailor, but was unwilling to finally press charges until all of my facts were in order. You are more direct. You always reason along the most sensible path, even if it is incompatible with other evidence: even though the wine bottle could not have possibly produced bees-wings in only one glass, you concluded that there must have been three perpetrators, as that was the safest guess. These examples surely illustrate our contrasting elements and make compatibility seem impossible.



We, however, are undeniably sublime: our dissimilarities and commonalities together allow me to reason most effectively. Possessing an aide such as you, doctor, I may stay out of the danger of traps set by my enemies, for I will always maintain an ally who can preserve me in my danger. As he is a strong man, I may have been wrung by Mr. Croker, or blown to smithereens, as was his victim, Sir Brackenstall, without such a faithful and adventurous comrade as you. Your lesser intellect also keeps you from disrupting and challenging my reasoning with false ideas. Your adventurous works (though I resent them) guarantee me loyal clients, like Mr. Hopkins. Your contrasting mindset, though a seeming detriment, is impossibly helpful in my investigations.

Fate has truly exercised her characteristic clairvoyance in creating such a sublime team as we have proven to be. We would be useless as a pair, however, were it not for both our contrasting qualities and our commonalities. We have closed another case, doctor, and I could not have done it without you: thank you for your unfaltering loyalty and bravery, as always.

Sincerely,
*Mr. Sherlock Holmes*

# There's Always Gray Areas

## Cecilia Goedde, 2nd Prize
## 7th – 9th Grade

It was a cold foggy day; it was also my first day at the office. Jolly old London, I thought as I turned the knob of the door. I was to interview Theresa Wright, the servant of Lady Brackenstall. Everyone was buzzing about the infamous Sherlock Holmes. I sat down at the table, staring at the paper and pen I had set on the table in front of me. I thought for a moment about Sherlock Holmes and how he always did what was right and defeated evil. I wondered how he knew what was right or not. As I wrote the date, February 17th, 1898, the door opened, and someone entered the room. It was time to begin.

"So, what did you think of him?" "I thought he was intelligent and just, she replied. In fact, the reason all his cases end right, with a criminal being found, is because of him. In all the mysteries he has solved he always does the good." I nodded and wrote all this down. My curiosity was growing by the second, I wanted to know what was so special about Sherlock Holmes. I looked up and saw Theresa Wright staring intently at me. I could feel her stare reach into my soul, as if she could read me like a book. She nodded, looking satisfied, as if she had found what she was looking for. She began very slowly, "I will tell you a secret that I have kept since the murder of Sir Eustace, on the condition that you shan't tell a soul." I pondered the consequences of possibly getting fired, then realized I didn't care, I needed to know. I nodded. She smiled and said, "good, I will tell you all I know about Mr. Holmes."

She thought and then said, "what first struck me about Mr. Holmes was his perseverance. The facts were all on the table. The Randalls earlier robbery. The three wine glasses, the frayed bell rope, and a dead Sir Eustace. We placed all the evidence carefully and methodically. It was foolproof."

"Wait, I interrupted her, it wasn't the Randalls? You placed the evidence? Then who did it?" She had a glimmer in her eye as she said, "Mr. Jack Croker." I took a deep breath and realized that name was familiar. Then I remembered I had seen an article about him earlier that morning. "Wait, Isn't that former Lady Brackenstall's new

husband?" She answered "yes but let me continue. He entered the room and knew something was wrong. He could have left the case alone and walked away. But he had to right the man's death. And so, he learned our secret."

She paused for a moment and said, "What I admired the most about him, was his justice. He looked at every side of the story. His idea of the criminal isn't always the person who committed the crime, but the one who hurt others. Look, for example, at Mr. Croker. He is a good man, who was doing something wrong for the right reason. Mr. Croker was protecting her from her abusive husband. Every mystery he solves, he does out of the goodness of his heart. That is what always defeats evil, him seeing all sides of the story."

At this point my head was spinning. "Was this real justice? In this case the man got away. Is that right? Do his cases end with the bad being defeated or does it end with the evil getting away? I just didn't understand, was Sherlock Holmes a good guy? Or do we just think he is? I was still thinking about it when it hit me. Good and bad isn't always black and white, there are almost always gray areas. I realized all of his cases have bad people, but it's up to him to decide who that is, it's easy to say the person who committed the crime is bad, but you have to realize there are other sides to the story. He rights the wrong because he strives for truth, not glory. He could've easily said the real answer, who really committed the crime and could 've gotten money, fame, and praise. He is the reason that all his cases have happy endings. As I looked up, I realized Theresa Wright had left. I also realized my notebook had almost nothing in it, but that was okay, because no matter what I was going to keep that secret. I realized it's up to us to determine the good and avoid the evil. The question is will you?

# The Journey of Mastering Deduction

## Madeline Mozlin, 3rd Prize
## 7th – 9th Grade

May 27th, 1890
223 Baker Street, London

To: Sherlock Holmes

My dear Mr. Holmes- it has been brought to my attention by you and your companion, Watson, recently solving the "Red Headed League". While Watson greatly contributes to all of these solved mysteries, I can not help but notice your jaw-dropping ability of using deduction while solving all these crimes. It is truly something no one else can do, especially as well as you. How do you do it? It is surely something I would like to master, just as you have. So, Mr. Holmes, would you embark on teaching me how to use deduction as well as you can? I surely know it is quite much to ask of you, but both you and I would benefit from this.

Allow me to defend my case. Your intelligent observations about dear old Wilson were truly astonishing. Your discerning discovery of the fish tattoo above his wrist would not have caught any other young lad's eye! But you, Mr. Holmes, indicated that the pink scales on that peculiar fish were done by the work of a Chinese tattoo artist, for the trick of staining the scales pink is unique to China. To be able to conclude such reasoning as that, well that would surely be a gift like no other. Having the ability to notice such small details, yet conclude such mysteries using those tiny details, is truly extraordinary.

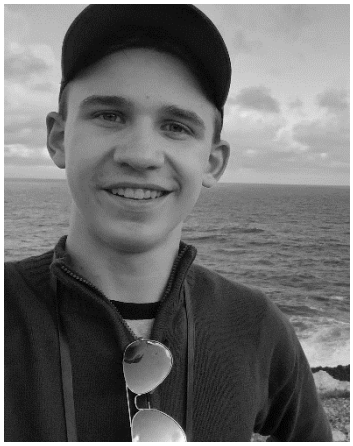
While not as great as you, I have noticed myself slowly learning how to use this method of deduction. Last week, my close companion, Charles, had unfortunately lost his fiend, ferocious bulldog, Ryker. We interviewed all of his neighbors about this case, but I got a terrible sense that the odd couple who resided next to him had taken this creature. You see, Ryker has always been a nighttime creature, always barking into the night. Every night I am with Charles, I find myself aroused by these loud howls. Charles

had told me that this couple had very often come over to complain about the noise. When I awoke that morning, I found dear old Charles pacing the living room- terrified for where his dog may have gone! When we communicated with the couple about this matter, they were quick to deny every accusation and or question. As we were talking to the two, I spotted a wounded arm slyly hidden behind the woman's back. As it turns out, the couple had taken Ryker and brought him to the nearby pound, but based on the scratches, Ryker did not go without a fight. We were fortunately able to rescue him, and Charles had a long quarrel with the two. But my point is, Mr. Holmes, I myself discovered the wounded arm. I checked the nearby pound, and I concluded the mystery solved, for I was told who brought Ryker to the pound- that unworthy, wretched couple. I therefore could possibly be called the "Sherlock Holmes" of that mystery. Ha!

One main objective of mine that I wish to achieve, assuming you're willing to teach me, is to have the chance to solve real mysteries, not some cheap no good neighborhood crime. I'm talking about enigma's like the "Red Headed League"! In these larger problems, that crucial ability to notice the tiny details is essential. And you notice these small details very quickly like I notice my wife's recent cheating on me with the mailman. Small details including keeping in mind that Vincent Spaulding worked for half wages, and developed his "photography" in the basement. Using that prior knowledge, you concluded Spaulding guilty of attempted robbery, for he was digging a tunnel, not developing pictures. I must say that was such an obvious lie! Even I, after reading that in the daily paper, noticed that it seemed quite suspicious. I must not have thought much about it, but you, Mr. Holmes, obviously did. Your inspirational work truly has me seated on the edge of my chair every time.

So you see, Mr. Holmes, why it is so incredibly important that you'd be my mentor in using deduction. This is no ordinary request, I tell you. This is one that can greatly benefit both you and me. It gives me the opportunity to work with a detective, quite frankly the best detective there ever has been, and you, the opportunity to teach someone to follow in your footsteps. I have so much to learn- so much to prove to you! So, Mr. Holmes, would you kindly embark on this journey with me- the journey of mastering deduction?

Yours truly,
*Theodore H. Matthews*



# Judge, Jury, and Liberator


## Thomas Hébert, 1st Prize
## 10th – 12th Grade


As President Abraham Lincoln once said, "Mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice." Throughout the Canon and the years of his consulting detective career, Sherlock Holmes brings dozens of perpetrators to justice while unraveling numerous baffling cases. A reliable guardian of justice and equity, he can be trusted to make the right decision. Yet, at times, his judgment seems to falter. One example of such an event is in "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot," wherein Mortimer Tregennis kills his sister Brenda and drives his two brothers mad using a poison known as the devil's-foot root. Leon Sterndale, who loved Brenda, then kills Mortimer with the same root. Sherlock Holmes catches Sterndale but chooses to let him go free, even after proving his guilt in the murder of Mortimer Tregennis. However, this is anything but a lapse in insight. Rather, Holmes's ultimate decision to show mercy to Sterndale is indisputably justified due to the extenuating circumstances of the crime as well as Holmes' own experience and wisdom.

Sherlock lets Sterndale go mainly due to the contextual intricacies surrounding the offense and Sterndale's relative innocence. Even though, by his own admission, Sterndale killed Mortimer, his deed was somewhat warranted. Mortimer was the one who murdered his innocent sister and drove his two brothers mad. Consequently, fueled by a rage that only heartbreak can kindle, Sterndale used the root to kill Mortimer, exacting his revenge with the same method that caused his poor beloved Brenda's demise. Love impels people to actions that defy logic. Holmes himself admits

that if he had a love who suffered such a fate, he "might act even as [Sterndale] has done." Sherlock recognizes that Sterndale had no real criminal intent. He committed the murder with little premeditation, spurred on by vengeance. Sterndale was not the "real killer"; rather, he acted out of revenge, eliminating the original criminal. Mortimer undoubtedly had murderous intentions, whereas Sterndale would never have committed the crime if not for the initial murder of Brenda. Holmes likely feels sympathy for Sterndale, who is more a victim than a culprit. These elements of the case legitimize his choice to free Sterndale.

Regardless of the mitigating circumstances, though, is Sherlock qualified to make such a choice? Many would argue that a private citizen should not be allowed to judge an important matter like criminal punishment. Yet Holmes is much more than an ordinary citizen. He has an excellent familiarity with the field of crime, attained through years of experience as a consulting detective. In fact, he may be more capable of determining a culprit's fate than a judge or jury. The criminal justice system is and has always been flawed, and punishment from the police might only make Sterndale more likely to commit a future crime, alienating him from the government and the law. In contrast, Sherlock's extensive familiarity with the field qualifies him to decide Sterndale's fate. In the Canon, Watson relates sixty stories of cases Holmes solved, yet he repeatedly states that there are many more instances left untold. Sherlock Holmes is one of the most esteemed men in England, and known around the world for his astounding reasoning, bafflingly complex logic, and razor-sharp mind. Years as a detective have given him pivotal knowledge and practical wisdom. There is no substitute for experience, and Sherlock has that in abundance. One of the most critical subjects he has mastered is human nature. Holmes is an expert at reading people, and he possesses a deep understanding of those he meets. His powers of observation combine with this knowledge of humanity to make him unrivaled in his acuity. It is this wisdom that allows him to assess Sterndale with a discerning eye, determining his hidden motives and basic nature. He recognizes that, if left on his own, Sterndale will certainly not perpetrate another crime, let alone kill someone. Clearly confident in Sterndale's relatively sound character, he allows him to leave with no consequences. Holmes can be trusted to soundly judge anyone due to his

experience in the field. Consequently, his choice to let Sterndale go remains fully rationalized.

The moral ambiguity of Holmes's choice cannot be ignored. Society agrees that murderers must not be allowed to run amok. Nevertheless, this story presents a reasonable exception due to both Holmes's extensive expertise and the alleviating details of the crime itself. The detective is justified in releasing Sterndale. While this may at first appear to be unwise, it is in fact quite an astute choice. By not turning in the perpetrator, Sherlock shows kindness and lenience, eliminating the possibility of any future animosity as well as performing an admirable act of forgiveness. Holmes knows that a jail sentence will do no good to Sterndale, nor will it help others. Moreover, he realizes that the crime can be effortlessly hidden. The original murder is solved, and the killer identified. It will be easy to label Mortimer's death as a suicide. No one will ever know about Sterndale's vengeful act. A wise person knows not only when to punish but also when to forgive. It speaks to Holmes's incredible insight that he knows both. Thus, he chooses to let Sterndale go, keeping his murder a secret from the world. Mercy is a virtue, and for good reason. A choice such as this leaves a far greater impact than any punishment could, ensuring the endurance of Sterndale's morality and closing the unforgettable case of the devil's-foot root.

# Charles Augustus Milverton

## Alexandra Thomas, 2nd Prize
## 10th – 12th Grade

In his work *The Social Contract,* Jean-Jacques Rousseau states, "In truth, laws are always useful to those with possessions and harmful to those who have nothing…" The letter of the law and a person's ideas of right and wrong are not always synonymous, and in some cases a person must betray one to follow the other. In the Sherlock Holmes story *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton,* the titular character Milverton is a person with possessions who takes advantage of Lady Eva, who has nothing, while Holmes and Watson choose morality over legality in resolving the case. Holmes and Watson's actions may not align with the law, but do align with the obligation to protect the powerless and confront the corrupt.

Lady Eva, the betrothed of the Earl of Dovercourt, hires Sherlock Holmes, and by extension John Watson, to negotiate the price of her liberation from the extortion of Charles Augustus Milverton. Corruption finds a host in Milverton, a known blackmailer whose victims are frequently women with connections to men of high status. Holmes agrees, and after a failed negotiation with Milverton, decides to evade the law with Watson in order to protect the future and reputation of his client.

Holmes knows the only way to defeat Milverton is through criminal avenues. Milverton is a strategic and calculating man, and if there were a way to obtain the blackmail legally, he would have done so. Holmes states himself, "There is no other possible way of regaining these letters," other than breaking into Milverton's home and stealing them. He could have, of course, simply refused the case once he realized this fact, but doing so would have betrayed his moral code. Holmes values standing up for the helpless, in this case Lady Eva, and finds fulfillment in the vanquishment of villains such as Milverton. Holmes knows that inaction would only lead to the downfall of a defenseless person, and thus decides that the price of illegality is less steep than the price of his values.

John Watson represents a moral middle ground between Holmes and Milverton. He wholeheartedly agrees that Milverton's actions in blackmailing and taking advantage of women are wrong, but he in turn effectively blackmails Holmes to join him in his escapade. He tells Holmes, "I give you my word of honor - and I never broke it in my life - that I will take a cab straight to the police-station and give you away, unless you let me

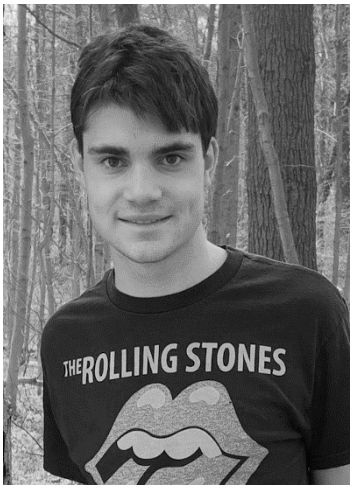
share this adventure with you," in order to force Holmes to bring him on this burgling adventure. This is essentially the same act that Milverton is doing to his victims. However, Watson's intentions differ greatly from Milverton's. Watson wants to join Holmes in the defeat of a "villain," as they call him, while Milverton wants financial gain for himself at the expense of these women.

Obviously, the duo of Holmes and Watson values justice; however, when the opportunity presents itself to take action against a murderer, they abstain. This is because the murder victim is Milverton himself, and their choice of inaction is what upholds their values. If they had not acted in helping Lady Eva, they would have knowingly allowed her life and reputation to be ruined. This path would go against their chosen duty to protect the powerless and instead actively help the corrupt. When one of Milverton's previous victims comes to take her revenge, Holmes and Watson's choice of inaction in this case accomplishes the same goal, protecting the powerless.

Holmes justifies their actions by stating, "I suppose that you will admit that the action is morally justifiable, though technically criminal," and Watson agrees with the assessment that "...it is morally justifiable so long as our object is to take no articles save for which are used for an illegal purpose." While this is true, they take it a step further by destroying all of the letters in Milverton's possession upon his murder, and continue to believe the goodness of their actions. This is because taking these objects from Milverton is more akin to restoration than theft, due to the fact that the objects were stolen by Milverton in the first place. The morality of their actions persists through the story, and even someone from Scotland Yard like Lestrade can see the ethics of their decisions. Lestrade comments, "We had our eyes upon this Mr. Milverton for some time, and, between ourselves, he was a bit of a villain. He is known to have held papers which he used for blackmailing purposes. These papers have all been burned by the murderers. No article of value was taken, as it is probable that the criminals were men of good position, whose sole object was to prevent social exposure." Their decision not to intervene in the mystery woman's mission leads to the eradication of a known villain.

Holmes and Watson's actions may not align with the law, but they do align with the obligation to protect the powerless and confront the corrupt. In this story, the protagonists' actions and inactions repeatedly take the path of morality over that of legality, to the benefit of their client, Lady Eva, and even Scotland Yard. The letter of the law, and according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the purpose of the law, states that Holmes and Watson's actions were wrong. However the moral law that both Holmes and Watson adhere to in this story supports their actions as just and necessary. Law and morality are not always the same, and sometimes a person must betray one to uphold the other.

# A Scandal in Bohemia




## Ryan Foley, 3rd Prize
## 10th – 12th Grade

In his writings of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* published 1690, English philosopher and defender of freedom worldwide John Locke mentions, "Justice and truth are the common ties of society." His statement was critical to the modern understanding and pursuit of what embodies a good society. Locke tells us that this society has a value for, among many things, the pursuit of *justice* and the pursuit of *truth*, and that good citizens have the obligation to pursue these two virtues through whatever means necessary - ultimately leading to the most paramount revolutions in the modern history of the Western Hemisphere. Sherlockian enthusiasts also have a value for these two things, and so do the characters Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Their attachment to these two traditionally English values sets a guiding virtue and precedence for their adventures. Holmes and Watson also follow the Lockean principle of pursuing truth and justice regardless of the consequences. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia" offers Sherlockians a survey of these principles. In the story, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson breaks the law and endangers themselves, all in the name of the pursuit of justice and truth.

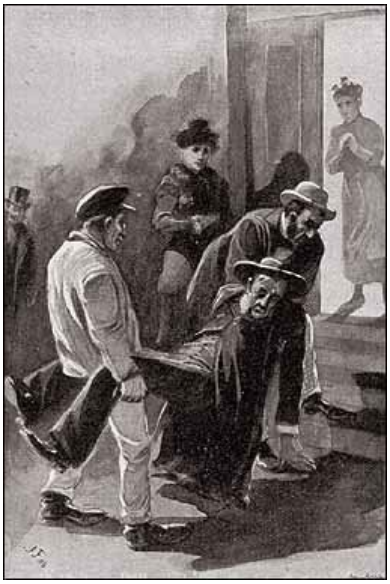
In the story "A Scandal in Bohemia" the reader will explore Watson and Holmes' pursuit of justice, the first traditional guiding Lockean principle for their actions. The primary method of pursuing justice is not necessarily an intellectual one. It is, however, a personal one. In the story, the future King of Bohemia is calling for Holmes and Watson to obtain a compromising photo of himself. The reader will most likely deduce that this is, at least partly, the King's own fault. However, in pursuit of the ideal of justice, Holmes does not write off the desperate King's plea for help. He rather embraces it, proclaiming:

> *'Then, goodnight, your Majesty, and I trust that we shall soon have some good news for you. And goodnight, Watson' he added, as the wheels of the royal brougham*

*rolled down the street. 'If you will be good enough to call tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock I should like to chat this little matter over with you.'*

Holmes' proclamation is seemingly simple, but Doyle chose his words carefully. Holmes, in this statement, tells the reader that Holmes will focus his renowned intellect on the case for the rest of the adventure entirely, using whatever means possible to accomplish justice. Although Holmes is still searching, Watson directly communicates this personal motivation. In an important turning point of the story, the beginning of the second act, Dr. Watson sits beside his fire and contemplates the case. He reaches an epiphany. The reader may recall:

*I already was deeply interested in his inquiry, for though it was surrounded by none of the grim and strange features which were associated with the two other crimes I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own. Indeed, apart from the investigation which my friend had on hand, there was a masterly grasp of a situation, and his keen, incisive reasoning, which made it a pleasure to study his system of work…*



Watson's epiphany is the final brick that builds the foundation of both of their personal commitment to the first of two Lockean ideals: the pursuit of justice. To truly, legitimately, pursue justice, one must have a personal commitment. This personal commitment must give a sense of justification for deviation of structured social and legal norms by breaking the law in order to reach a just conclusion.

The second guiding Lockean principle is the pursuit of truth. Yet Locke leaves us with the question: What is the truth? There is no one answer to that lingering question in the minds of all Sherlockians. For Holmes, it may be his deductive reasoning and intellect. For Watson, it may be his passion, his deeply personal commitment. In "A Scandal in Bohemia", there is a subjective truth for the King of Bohemia and his former mistress, Irene Adler. The King intensely yearns for the photograph of him with her to be destroyed, fearing it will destroy his reputation. He at first masks himself out of fear, and possibly shame for his actions. Irene Adler, however, insists on keeping the photograph as some form of retaliation for the King ending his relationship with her, demonstrating that truth for both of these two characters is divergently subjective. Adler has a commitment to her truth which she maintains throughout the story until its conclusion:

*When I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think … As for the photograph, your client may rest in peace. The King may do what he will without hindrance from one who he has wronged.*

Adler's quotation best summarizes how each character, and each person's truth is unique. Every individual's truth is subjective. For Watson and Holmes, they believe they must help the King, which they do. By trying to pursue truth, Holmes instructs Watson to create a distraction in Adler's home to investigate the compromising photograph. Their pursuit of truth is what most completely allows the fulfillment of justification for Holmes and Watson's actions.

Thus, bringing Holmes, Watson, and the reader to the end of their journey. The two intellectuals act on two guiding principles - *justice* and *truth* - to give excellent cause for deviating from social and legal structures, inspired by the traditionally English principles that also justified the founding of democracy, and historical revolutions in other communities. In "A Scandal in Bohemia", Doyle gives us a reminder, echoing the same principles Holmes and Watson follow: One must sometimes break the conventional legal and social structures to accomplish the ideals of *justice* and *truth* - something for which all good communities and citizens aspire.

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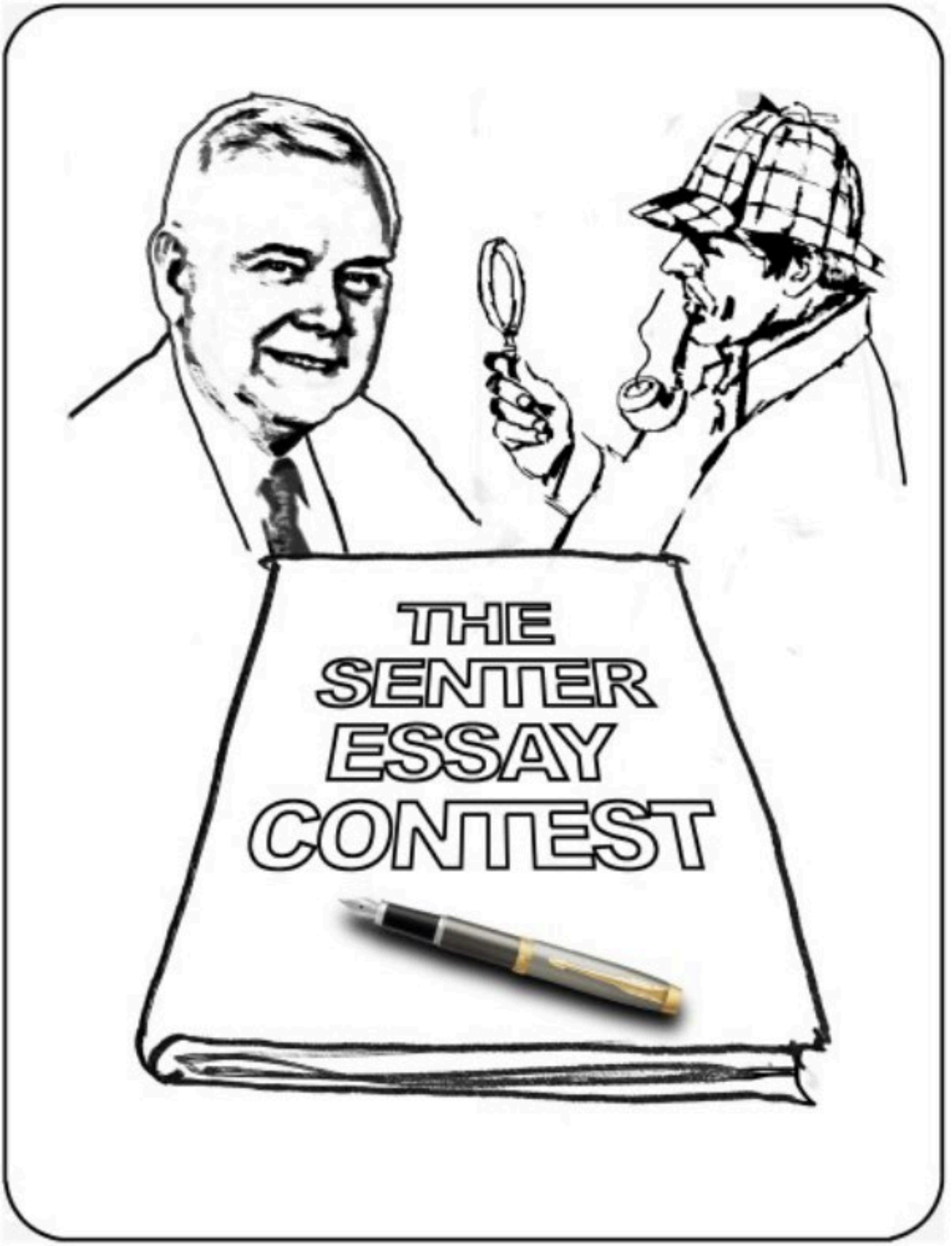
Conan Doyle, A. "A Scandal in Bohemia" (*The Classic Illustrated Sherlock Holmes* ed.).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