

# THE ORIGINS OF SHERLOCKING IN SCOUTING

## *An Introduction for the Scout Leader to Share*

**Jerry Riggs**

*Jerry Riggs, a Sherlockian who has been involved with Boy Scouts in the Chief Okemos Council in Michigan for nearly fifty years, has developed ways to instruct his Scouts in the time honored "Sherlocking" first developed by Lord Baden-Powell for British army scouts and later used by him in the International Boy Scout movement. To quote Mr. Riggs, "Observation and deduction are no less important than the other skills we have all commonly come to connect with Scoutcraft, that is, signaling, lifesaving, firebuilding, etc. If anything, detective skills are among the most important abilities for a scout to master. It is a primary job of any scout to observe subtle signs in the environment and to draw accurate inferences from those 'clues'. Failure to do this properly in the field can lead to serious consequences." Over the years, Mr. Riggs has sought to bring "Sherlocking" into American scouting.*

*Mr. Riggs is a retired Postal worker, a Vietnam veteran, long distance runner, artist and an accomplished story teller.*

In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Adventure of the Copper Beeches*, Sherlock Holmes complained that readers of his adventures thought they were no more than a series of entertaining tales. But Holmes insisted they should be studied instead as a course of instruction in the practice of observation and deduction.

Could this be true? *Could someone learn the art of detection by studying all the Sherlock Holmes stories?*

"Absolutely!" believed Colonel Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell, the chief scout of the British army. And when he wrote *Aids to Scouting for NCOs and Men* in 1899, the Sherlock Holmes stories were recommended reading for all his cavalry Scouts. Their very lives, and the lives of those who relied on their work, depended on this course of instruction in that series of tales.

The interest of British boys in the use of this army manual led to Baden-Powell's adaptation of it into *Scouting for Boys* (1908), which began the official Boy Scout movement in the UK. This book had the same emphasis on training boys to be backwoods detectives in a skill known as 'Sherlock Holmes-ism', or 'Sherlocking'. This has been all but forgotten today.

Of course, we know that Sherlock is a fictional hero, but for all that, he is no less heroic. And insofar as his methods for gathering clues and solving mysteries are real, so is he. And this activity is not just to develop a hobby for you, but to give you a *real skill* that is at least the equal of any other lifesaving skill, or all your backwoods training. Without it, the Scout's training is incomplete; to say nothing of missing out on the excitement such an activity will add to your life. And you never know (any more than Sherlock Holmes had known, when for him it began as the merest hobby) how much more may come of it than that!

*Now, in the aim to revive this lost skill, integral to the complete training of Scouts, Jerry Riggs (50-year veteran Scouter with Chief Okemos Council, Lansing, Michigan) has originated and begun to publish sets of guidelines to reintroduce "Sherlocking" into Scouting. He has kindly agreed to share some of his work with the Beacon Society.*

*For more information about Lord Baden-Powell and "Sherlocking" see links on the Beacon Society website:*

**<http://beaconsociety.com/Scouting&SherlockHolmes.html>**

# S.H.E.R.L.O.C.K.

(See, Hear, Examine, Read, Learn, Observe, Conclude, Know)

## *The Motto for Sherlocking*

Just as the motto on the scroll of the Boy Scout's badge is 'Be Prepared', these eight words, made up of the letters of Holmes's first name, are a list of what you want to get into the habit of doing to be prepared as a trained Sherlockian. First they should be practiced in everyday life: learn them before they are needed. Thereafter in the investigation of a mystery riddle or mock-up of a crime scene, or even the real thing, they can become your tools to problem-solving in all other areas of your life as well.

### **See**

This means more than just seeing, but using all your senses.

### **Hear**

This is more than hearing sounds. It's listening carefully to a story told by a victim or a witness. A set of clues at a scene without a witness's story, means twice the work to bring the whole story together.

### **Examine**

Put everything to a test, whether objects had been at a scene before or were recently left there, or anywhere leading to or from it, and how they might have got there.

### **Read and Learn**

These are central to all the points of Sherlocking. Thomas Carlyle said, "*The true university is a collection of books.*" We know Holmes had at least some university education, but it's clear that his real learning came from the great variety of books he read on his own. And Holmes was also self-taught in the knowledge of self-defence and the practical knowledge of the law.

### **Observe**

Observation is not only the practice of noticing this and that, but remembering it, even if it doesn't appear important at the time — remembering it just in case. If you notice a thing, whether it's important or not, it will do you no good if you only forget it later on. So practice memory training. Observation should progress for the Sherlockian from practice to a habit.

### **Conclude**

Conclude is another word for deduce. It means to form your opinion based on all you have observed, and that depends on how well-prepared

you are in the other points listed above. The better you have observed, and the better you are trained, the nearer to the truth your conclusions will be. This requires you to believe in yourself enough to pull together all the pieces of the story you have so far, and all the clues you have observed—and with imagination and intuition, deduce what the end of the story must be.

### **Know**

This is where all your beliefs—based on seeing, hearing, examination, reading, learning, observation, and making conclusions—are proven true or false. It may be necessary to return to the first clues you saw and follow them to places or things that offer more information. Sometimes recreating what happened at the scene under investigation will help. Other times it may help to share your conclusions with people concerned with the case, to judge their reactions.

## **GAMES AND EXERCISES**

### **Exercise: Hidden Messages**

*Hidden Messages will utilize Examine, Read and Learn and Conclude from S.H.E.R.L.O.C.K.*

Have someone in the group prepare a hidden message by using the method of inserting evenly spaced words within the message. The one who breaks the code fastest wins. Or the leader can prepare a coded message, assigning teams of three or four to work on detecting the hidden message. Fastest team wins.

### **Exercise: Reading Others**

*Reading others will utilize See, Hear, Examine and Observe, Read (body language, expressions) and Conclude from S.H.E.R.L.O.C.K.*

1. Invite a person with whom the Scouts are unacquainted to visit the group. They can give reading, be interviewed, participate in a meal, etc. Then have the Scouts put down their impressions and conclusions as to the person's age, occupation, ethnic origin, etc.

Repeat with another person, this time prepare the Scouts by telling them that they should be looking for various characteristics of the visitor. Compare results.

2. Have Scouts interview a visitor who will describe a personal experience, some of which is true and some of which is fantasy. Ask the Scouts to determine what is true. Compare results and reasons for their conclusions. Repeat with someone they know well. Compare.

**Exercise: Reading Clues**

*Reading Clues will utilize See, Examine, Read and Learn and Conclude from S.H.E.R.L.O.C.K.*

Assemble items which might be in a woman's purse or a man's pockets. Have Scouts examine the items, then decide on the characteristics of the owner. Compare and defend conclusions.

**Exercise: What happened here?**

*A "What happened here?" scene will utilize all facets of S.H.E.R.L.O.C.K.*

Create a setting of clues which can be used to solve a crime, recreate an accident, describe a meeting followed by an altercation, etc. The Scouts should examine all the clues, without disturbing any, and be able to reach a conclusion as to what has happened and defend the conclusion. The leader can lead a discussion dealing real life situations where this type of solution is used, such as automobile accidents with no witnesses, other injuries and accidents, locating owners of lost animals, a burglary, etc.

**Exercise: A Mystery Story**

*Mystery Story will utilize Hear, Examine (mentally), Learn and Know from S.H.E.R.L.O.C.K.*

Create an installment story about Sherlock Holmes and have the Scouts try to decide at the end of each installment who the criminal is and why they think so. Or use a story which they are unlikely to have read, if you don't feel capable of writing a pastiche. This has been used at the Cub Scout level by Mr. Riggs.

*"In storytelling sessions at some of our council camps, I experimented with re-introducing the skills of Sherlocking to Scouting to mixed-age groups of young boys, some girls, and adults. Anticipating the possibility that any of my listeners may have read any of the stories from the Doyle-ian canon, I composed new, original Holmes serial mysteries: well-researched and true to the times, person, and methods of Holmes. By way of introduction, I informed them that they were about to enter into the training of Scouting's most important skill, which had not been taught for nearly a hundred years. Then from day to day, over the course of four sessions, I unfolded the mystery in serial form, with fragments of clues and evidence for each group to hone their deductive skills against. "*

A certificate of completion or other recognition can be awarded those who have completed the S.H.E.R.L.O.C.K exercises.