Baker Street Readers

Great reads for all ages

‘I find myself in a very strange and mysterious situation.’

When Miss Mary Morstan is invited to meet a secretive stranger, she asks Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson to help her.

Captain Morstan has disappeared from his hotel without a trace. Should Miss Morstan dare to hope that her father is still alive?

What horrible scene awaits the famous detective and his friend when they break down the door to Bartholomew Sholto’s attic room?

Who is the man with the wooden leg, and why is he so full of bitterness and hatred? Will Toby, the cleverest tracker dog in London, help Holmes and Watson solve one of their most difficult cases?

Lexile® Level	AR Level	Word Count
830L	5.1	5,826

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“Miniature masterpieces”

- BBC R4, Open Book

THE SIGN OF THE FOUR

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

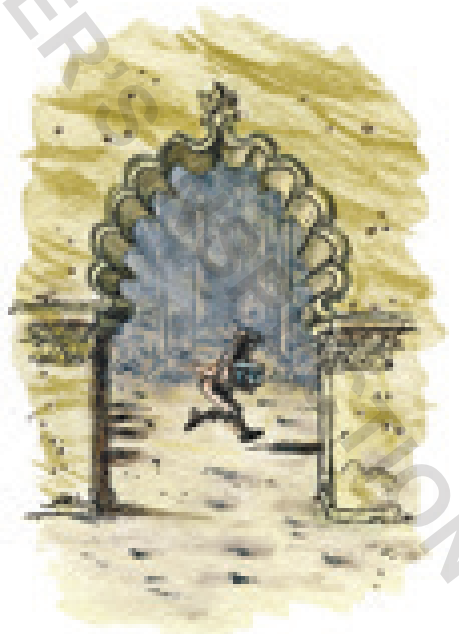
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TEACHER'S EDITION ONLY

Baker Street Readers

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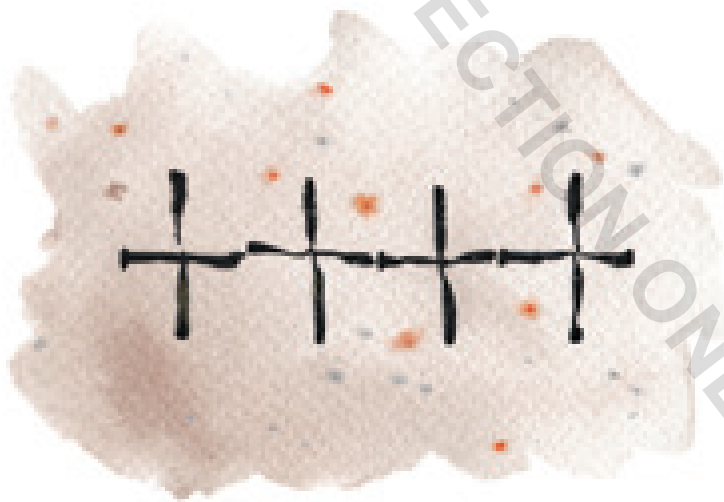
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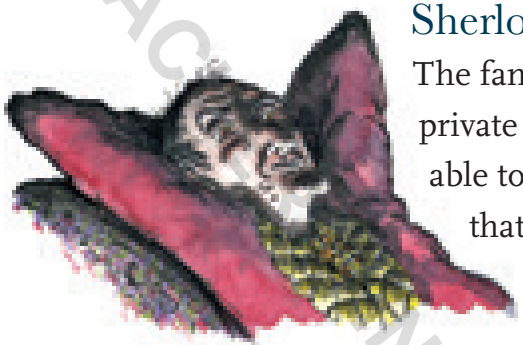
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THE CHARACTERS



Sherlock Holmes

The famous and brilliant private detective. Will he be able to solve the strange puzzle that Miss Mary Morstan brings to him?



Dr Watson

Sherlock Holmes's friend, dependable and brave. Why is he so worried that Holmes will find the hidden treasure?



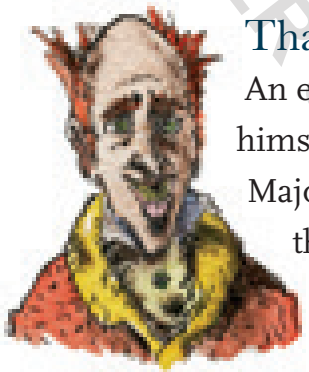
Miss Mary Morstan

Miss Morstan is an attractive and strong-minded young woman. Will she be able to discover the truth about her father, Captain Morstan?

Major Sholto

Major Sholto retired from the British Indian Army many years ago and returned to live in London. What sinister secret did he bring back with him? Why is he so afraid?





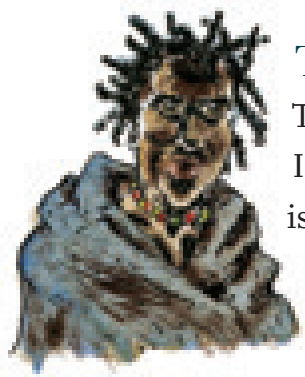
Thaddeus Sholto

An eccentric, wealthy man who surrounds himself with luxuries. He is the son of Major Sholto. What does he know about the frightening events which take place at his twin brother's house?

Jonathan Small

Jonathan Small is an old soldier, strong and fierce. What has made him so keen to seek revenge?





Tonga

Tonga comes from the Andaman Islands, in the Bay of Bengal. He is determined to protect his friend. What is he doing so far from home?

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THE SIGN OF THE FOUR

I walked into our sitting room at 221b Baker Street to find Sherlock Holmes slumped in his chair, his eyes half-closed.

'I hope I have not disturbed you,' I said.

'I am not tired, my dear Watson, just bored. I have not had a new case for a week or more. I need puzzles and problems to keep my mind active.'

'Very well. I have been out this afternoon. Can you tell me where? Or perhaps that is too difficult a question, as you have so little evidence.'

'Not at all.' He looked at me closely. 'Let me see – ah yes. You have been to the post office in Wigmore Street, where you sent a telegram.'

'You are absolutely right! But I confess I don't see how you know that. It was a sudden impulse on my part, and I have mentioned it to no one.'

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'It is simple,' he remarked, chuckling at my surprise. 'Observation tells me that you have a little reddish soil on your shoe. Just outside the Wigmore Street post office they have taken up the pavement and dug up some earth in such a way that it is difficult to avoid treading in it. The earth is of a peculiar reddish colour which is found, as far as I know, nowhere else in the neighbourhood. So much is observation. The rest is deduction.'

'How, then, did you deduce the telegram?'

'Why, of course I knew that you had not written a letter, since I sat opposite you all morning. I see also in your open desk there that you have a sheet of stamps and a thick bundle of paper and envelopes. What could you go into the post office for, then, but to send a telegram?'

'Now that you have explained your reasoning, it does sound very straightforward,' I said. 'But is that Mrs Hudson I hear coming up the stairs?'

Our landlady knocked and entered, bringing a visiting card on a brass tray. 'A young lady to see you, Sir,' she said to Holmes.

'Miss Mary Morstan,' he read. 'Ask her to come in, Mrs Hudson. Don't go, Doctor. I believe we may have a new case to deal with.'



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When Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson decide to take their pistols with them on their dangerous mission, we see a different side of the Victorian period. Many of the laws and regulations which we take for granted today, and which help to make our lives safer and easier, did not exist. After 1870, gun owners had to have a licence, but anyone could get one from the post office – and you did not need a licence to buy a gun until the Parliament passed the Pistols Act of 1903. In the original version of *The Sign of the Four*, Sherlock Holmes injects himself with cocaine – a very dangerous drug – when he is feeling bored. Dr Watson warns Holmes about this risky habit, but there were no drug laws in Victorian times. The health risks of powerful drugs were not properly understood, and harmful substances such as opium were put into all sorts of products, such as cough medicine, which could be bought by anyone.

During the nineteenth century, Britain and other European countries ruled over colonies in large parts of Africa, India and Asia. This is not something we would approve of now, but it was accepted as normal by most people at the time.

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Arthur Conan Doyle uses the colonial setting of India under British rule to add excitement to the story, although some of the details he includes are not very accurate. One of Jonathan Small's three friends is called Mahomet Singh in the story. This would be impossible in real life, because 'Mahomet' is an Islamic name, and would not be found together with 'Singh', which is a name used by all male Sikhs. Tonga, an inhabitant of the Indian Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, is described in the original story as being a member of 'the smallest race upon this earth', a pygmy, but other ethnic groups were actually smaller than the Andaman Islanders. In the original story Conan Doyle gives us an exaggerated description of Tonga as a savage and violent man. By doing so, he shows both the fear and the lack of knowledge that many Victorians had about foreign people in far off lands who lived very different lives from themselves.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books, websites and films to gain a greater understanding of Arthur Conan Doyle and the world he lived in:

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