

# The Midnight Killer

Our suspenseful adaptation of the famous Sherlock Holmes story  
"The Adventure of the Speckled Band"

## About the Story

**Lexile:** 980L (captions)

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

## Learning Objective:

to identify and analyze what makes Sherlock Holmes a successful problem solver

## Key Skills:

character, mood, figurative language, character's motivation, inference, interpreting text, synthesizing, integrating ideas

## Essential Questions:

- What is the difference between seeing and observing?
- What does it take to become more mindful?
- Do people get what they deserve?

## Standards:

The texts and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: **R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.9, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6.** For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



## Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of materials at  
[scope.scholastic.com](http://scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- Vocabulary
- Informational Text

**Literature Connections:** ideas for connecting to curricular texts

### Activities to print or project:

- Vocabulary
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Integrating Ideas: Sherlock Holmes
- Quiz\*
- **Core Skills Workout:** Mood\*
- **Literary Elements:** Character Thinking Tool, Genre Exploration
- Contest Entry Form

\*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

## Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

### 1 Preparing to Read

#### Do-Now: Practice observation.

(5 minutes)

Tell students that the play features Sherlock Holmes, a fictional detective known for his powers of observation. Give them one minute to look around the classroom, taking in as many details as possible. Then have them close their eyes and answer questions about details in the room, such as: *How many windows are there? How many students are in class today? How many students are wearing jeans? What color is the poster on the door?* Discuss how hard or easy it was to recall these details.

#### Preview vocabulary.

(7 minutes, activity sheet online)

Project or distribute the **Vocabulary Words and Definitions**. Review the words: *assume, autopsy, biases, contorted, coroner, distraught, illuminating, instinct, schemer, ventilator*

### 2 Reading and Discussing the Play

(30 minutes, activity sheet online)

- Read aloud the “As You Read” box on page 12.
- Assign parts and read the play as a class.
- Discuss the following questions in groups.

#### Close-Reading Questions

▶ **Based on Scene 1, what can you tell about Holmes’s personality?** (character) *You can tell that Holmes lives for being a detective. He regards the day as “boring” if he has no cases to solve, and he responds with excitement to the news that a woman is distraught. He is also curious and has a scientific mind. He’s happy to live with an unpleasant odor for the sake of an experiment he is conducting.*

▶ **What is the mood of Scene 2? What details help create the mood?** (mood) *Scene 2 is spooky and suspenseful. Details that help create the mood include the howling wind, Julia’s contorted face, and mysterious noises like the clang and whistle.*

▶ **In Scene 3, Holmes says that the circumstances of Julia’s death are “very deep waters.” What does he mean?** (figurative language) *In deep water, it’s hard or impossible to see the bottom. Holmes compares the case to deep waters because it’s difficult to see where the case will lead.*

▶ **In Scene 3, when Dr. Roylott bursts into the room, why does Holmes start talking about the weather?** (character’s motivation) *By ignoring Dr. Roylott’s question, Holmes shows that he is not intimidated and that Dr. Roylott doesn’t have as much power as he thinks.*

▶ **At the end of Scene 3, why does Dr. Roylott bend the fireplace poker?** (character’s motivation) *Dr. Roylott is showing his strength in a further attempt to intimidate Holmes.*

▶ **In Scene 5, as Holmes and Watson wait in Helen’s room, “there is a sound like a soft rushing of air.” What is it?** (inference) *The sound is the hissing of the snake.*

#### Critical-Thinking Questions

▶ **Why do you think the playwrights use a flashback to tell the story of Julia’s death? How would the play be different if Helen were to simply tell the story to Holmes and Watson?** *If the playwrights had Helen tell the story, Helen would be speaking for a long time. It might get monotonous, and Julia wouldn’t appear as a character in the play. Seeing the scene of Julia’s death builds suspense as well. It is far more*

dramatic and helps viewers empathize more with Helen's situation because we experience it as it unfolds rather than hearing about it later.

► **At the end of the play, Holmes says, "Violence always recoils upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit that he digs for another." Do you agree? What does the statement tell you about Holmes?** *Answers may vary. Some students might say that wrongdoers do get what they deserve in the end; others might say that many people commit crimes and get away with them. You can tell that Holmes is driven by a desire to right wrongs as well as solve puzzles. Believing that justice is part of the natural order of things probably helps him to do his work with confidence.*

### 3 Reading and Discussing the Informational Text

(10 minutes, activity sheet online)

As a class, read the informational text and discuss the following questions.

#### Close-Reading Questions

► **According to the article, why is it important to be skeptical?** (interpreting

text) *Based on the example given, being skeptical helps you avoid believing things that are untrue and making poor decisions based on those beliefs.*

► **The article implies that Watson has value to Holmes as a listener. Is that Watson's only role in their relationship?** (synthesizing, character) *No; Holmes and Watson also seem to have a friendship based on respect and loyalty. When the situation becomes dangerous, Holmes gives Watson the chance to leave; Watson refuses.*

#### Critical-Thinking Question

► **How might thinking like Sherlock Holmes benefit you?** *Answers will vary. Students may point to what the author says about how keeping an open mind can stop you from missing out on what life has to offer and how other strategies can help you be more productive.*

### 4 Skill Building: Integrating Ideas

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Break students into groups to complete **Integrating Ideas: Sherlock Holmes**. This activity will prepare students to respond to the writing prompt on page 17. *For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.*

## Differentiate and Customize

#### For Struggling Readers

In a well-organized paragraph, explain what kind of person Sherlock Holmes is. Use text evidence to support your ideas.

#### For Advanced Readers

Choose two of the skills mentioned in the informational text and explain how Sherlock Holmes uses those skills to solve the case in the play.

#### For Theater Lovers

Working in groups, make a video version of the play. You may incorporate sets, costumes, music, and sound effects.

#### For Journalists

You are a reporter covering the case of the midnight killer. Write a news article about what happened. Include quotes from Sherlock Holmes and other key witnesses.