

Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of the Red-Headed League

A delightful adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous tale

About the Story

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to write the scene of a press conference given by several characters from the play

Key Skills: character, vocabulary, inference, key ideas and details

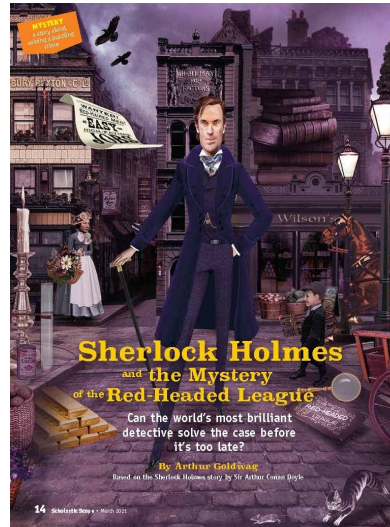
Essential Questions:

- What does it mean to be observant?
- Why is it important to be skeptical?
- How are mysteries solved?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.5, R.7, R.10, W.2, W.9, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Vocabulary
- Text-to-speech
- Podcast: The Sherlock Holmes Challenge

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: Plan Your Scene
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- **Core Skill Workout:** Inference
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

10 minutes

Do-Now: Practice Observation (5 minutes)

- Tell students that the play features Sherlock Holmes, a fictional detective known for his exceptional powers of observation. Give them one minute to look around at their surroundings, taking in as many details as possible. Then have them close their eyes and recall as many details about the room as they can. Discuss how hard or easy it was to recall these details. (If you are in a classroom, have students 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?)

Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Share **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** and review the words as a class. (Optionally, assign the practice **activity** for homework.) Highlighted words: *abominable*, *appalling*, *descending*, *eccentric*, *elusive*, *indispensable*, *keen*, *objective*, *ruse*

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box on page 15 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Assign parts and read the play as a class.
- Break students into groups to discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions. *Tip: If you're remote, you can have each group respond in a shared doc or discuss the questions in their own chat rooms; you can also make the questions an asynchronous assignment.*

Close-Reading Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **Based on information in Scene 1, what can you conclude about Sherlock Holmes's personality?** (character) *His living room is filled with books and test tubes, so he is likely curious and has a scientific mind. You can also tell that Holmes lives for being a detective. He tells Watson that he will "go mad with boredom" if he has no cases to solve, and he responds with excitement to the news that a man is upset and looking for his help with a case.*
2. **In Scene 1, Holmes asks Wilson if he suspects "foul play." What does he mean?** (vocabulary) *Wilson reports that a man is missing. Holmes is asking Wilson if he thinks there is a criminal explanation—possibly murder—for this man's disappearance.*
3. **In Scene 3, Watson and Holmes discuss why Victoria Spaulding would offer to work for half pay. Watson says, "Perhaps she is simply kindhearted." Holmes doesn't seem convinced. What does this exchange suggest about how Watson and Holmes differ?** (character, inference) *This exchange suggests that while Watson tries to see the good in people and give them the benefit of the doubt, Holmes waits to gather evidence to draw conclusions.*
4. **The caption with the illustration of Wilson's store says that "Sherlock Holmes is known for his exceptional powers of observation." What details in the play support this statement?** (character, key ideas and details) *Several details in the play show that Holmes is exceptionally observant. In Scene 3, Holmes notices that the shelves in Wilson's store are dusty, that the floor is hollow, and that Miss Spaulding's skirt is dirty. He also notices that there is a bank not far from the shop. Watson doesn't notice any of these things. This shows that Holmes notices details that others do not.*

Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **In Scene 2, why do you think the playwright uses flashbacks to tell Jabez Wilson's story of the Red-Headed League?** *Answers will vary, but students will likely say that if the playwright had Wilson tell the story, Wilson would be speaking for a long time. It might get monotonous and hard to follow. Experiencing Wilson's interactions with Victoria Spaulding and Duncan Ross as they unfold gives the reader a better idea of what actually happened between the characters.*
2. **At the end of the play Watson says, "No doubt someone else will attempt something appalling soon." Holmes replies, "Let us hope so." Does this make Holmes a bad person?** *Answers will vary. Some students will say that no, Holmes is just being humorous. Students may*

also say that Watson was stating a fact—crimes are committed often—and that Holmes hoping to solve those inevitable crimes isn't a bad thing. Others may say that it is cruel and morbid of Holmes to hope that a crime is committed just so he can solve it.

3. **What can we learn from the character of Sherlock Holmes?** *Answers will vary. Students may say that we can learn how much we can miss out on when we are not paying attention or not truly observing our surroundings. Students may also say that we can learn the importance of thinking logically, critically, and sometimes skeptically, when trying to solve a problem or answer a question.*

3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Plan Your Scene**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 18 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

4. Extension

30 minutes

- Have students listen to the **Sherlock Holmes Challenge podcast**. (You may also want to share the **transcript** with them.) Then discuss how they did. Did they figure out the mystery? If so, how? Finally, have students work in groups to come up with their own mystery challenges.