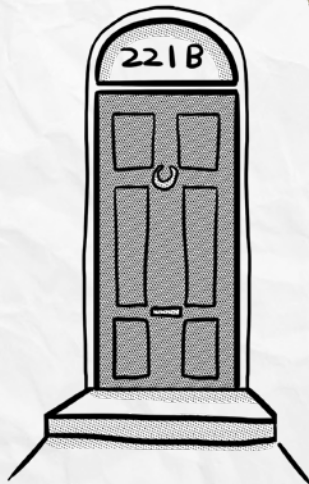
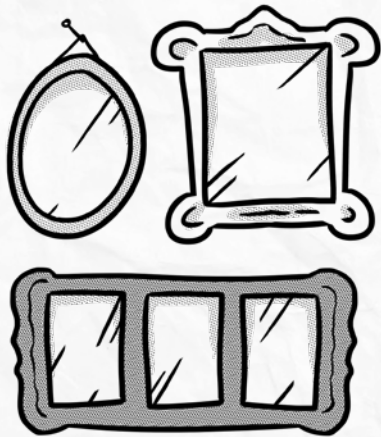
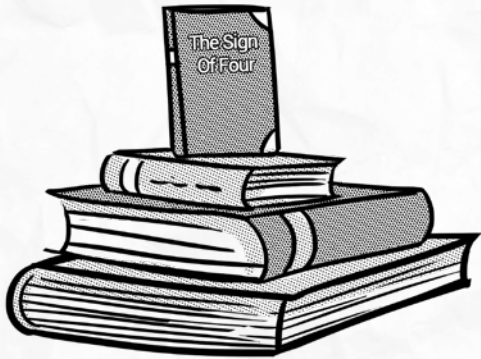


GCSE **The Sign of the Four**

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



KnowIT

Who's Who?

Over the course of the novel Sherlock Holmes and his assistant Doctor Watson meet a number of different people as they unravel the mystery.

'He was approaching the door of the house, when it opened, and a little, curly-headed lad of six came running out, followed by a stoutish, red-faced woman with a large sponge in her hand'.

List as many of them as you can remember and aim to plot them on a timeline in the order that Holmes meets them.

Character: Holmes

Holmes is a very famous character and features in a number of Sherlock Holmes stories. One of them is mentioned in the opening chapter of the novella. Can you remember what it is called?

Which of these words and phrases do you think describe Holmes most accurately and why?

- Clever.
- Funny.
- Intelligent.
- Rude.
- Scruffy.
- A master of disguise.
- Needs a lot of help.

Settings: Thaddeus Sholto's House

When the characters arrive at Thaddeus Sholto's house, what is unusual about the inside of the house compared to the outside?

Who answers the door?

Who has travelled to Thaddeus Sholto's house and why is this mysterious?

Look back at Chapter 4 and list some of the unusual items Thaddeus has in his living room. What country do you think they came from?

'An oasis of art in the howling desert of South London'.

What is strange about the way Thaddeus dresses before they leave the house?

Settings: 221B Baker Street

Why is this address famous? Who lives at this address?

Throughout the novella can you name at least two people who visit 221B Baker Street? Why do they go there?

'with a crisp knock our landlady entered, bearing a card upon the brass salver'.

Character: Watson

What have you learned from the novella about Doctor Watson? Though he is a doctor, where did he receive his own injury which worries him so much of the time?

How does Doctor Watson feel about his friend Sherlock Holmes? Does he admire him or dislike him? Are his feelings more complicated than that?

'More than once during the years that I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity underlay my companion's quiet and didactic manner'.

How does Sherlock treat Watson at times?

Can you think of anything that causes Watson to worry throughout the novella?

Structure: A Three Part Plot

Conan Doyle's novella is organised into a classic three-part plot structure.

1. In the first few chapters the setting and important characters are established. What and who are they?
2. The middle section gives Holmes a number of complications and obstacles to add tension and excitement. What might they include?
3. There is a dramatic climax and a resolution in which all the mysteries of the story are explained to us. Where does this take place and who explains the full story?

Structure: The Timescale

The whole action of the novella takes place over four days.

Can you identify and draw up a timeline as to which events are happening when, using the quotations to help you.

Day 1: Afternoon

Day 1: Evening

'At the Lyceum Theatre, the crowds were already thick at the side-entrances'.

Day 2: Middle of the night/early morning

Day 2: Morning

'A bath at Baker Street and a complete change freshened me up wonderfully. When I came down to our room I found the breakfast laid and Holmes pouring out the coffee'.

Day 2: Late afternoon

Day 2: Evening

Day 3: Morning

Day 4: Morning

Day 4: Afternoon

'At three o'clock in the afternoon there was a loud peal at the bell, an authoritative voice in the hall, and, to my surprise, no less a person than Mr Athelney Jones was shown up to me'.

Day 4: Evening/night

Context: Victorian England

The Victorian period was the one when Queen Victoria ruled England from 1837 until her death in 1901.

It was a time of great change and many advances in science and technology took place. The British Empire overseas expanded rapidly.

People were also fascinated with crime and it was at this time that the famous Jack the Ripper murders took place. Forensic analysis was just beginning to be used. How is Holmes's approach to examining the crime scene different to Athelney Jones'?

'My lens discloses more than one blood-mark, especially towards the end of the rope, from which I gather that he slipped down with such velocity that he took the skin off his hand'.

Language: Animal Imagery

Conan Doyle uses imagery connected with animals to describe characters in the novella.

Who do you think is being described here and what do these quotations suggest about them?

- *'clear-cut, hawk-like features'.*
- *'beady eyes gleaming and deep-set like those of a bird'.*
- *'like those of a trained bloodhound'.*

Which other character is described as being able to *'climb like a cat'* and *'strutting about as proud as a peacock'*?

Themes: Crime

One of the biggest themes of any detective story is, of course, the crime. However, in The Sign of the Four a number of crimes are committed and they all seem to link to the Agra Treasure.

Which characters have had a hand in stealing the treasure?

Which characters have also committed acts of violence or murder to get their hands on the treasure?

Who had the treasure last of all?

Who do you think felt the most guilty and remorseful about their crime?

'The cursed greed which has been my besetting sin through life has withheld from her the treasure, half at least of which should have been hers'.

Who did not feel guilty or remorseful?

'Whose loot is this, if it is not ours? Where is the justice that I should give it up to those who have never earned it? Look how I have earned it! Twenty long years in that fever-ridden swamp'.

Who went to prison for their crimes?

Who lost their life as a result of the treasure?

Who do you think the treasure rightfully belonged to? Where does it belong? What should have happened to it?