

CHARACTERS Sherlock Holmes

Five key things about Sherlock Holmes

1. **Holmes** is a new type of **Victorian investigator** who solves crimes using the **latest scientific techniques** and theories.
2. He has an **extensive knowledge of London** and its **criminal underworld**.
3. Due to his **incredible intelligence**, he can often appear **arrogant** and critical of others.
4. His manner is **detached** and **unemotional**.
5. He has **no close** associates or friends, **except Dr Watson**.



What do we learn about Holmes at the beginning of the novel?

- Holmes becomes frustrated when he is not working on a case, even going to the extremes of taking cocaine.
- He is the world's only '**unofficial consulting detective**': a role which he himself has created.
- He enjoys demonstrating his skills of scientific observation and deduction.
- He is not motivated by fame and is therefore unimpressed by Dr Watson's pamphlet, *A Study in Scarlet*, about their previous case.
- He carries out scientific research and publishes academic papers on his methods.

How does Holmes's character develop?

- **Chapters 1 and 6:** Holmes leads by example demonstrating his powers of deduction to Dr Watson and others.
- **Chapter 8:** There are signs that he cares about Dr Watson, e.g. asking about his war-injured leg (**Chapter 7**) and even playing him to sleep with his violin.
- **Chapters 1 and 8:** He makes fun of Athelney Jones and the police saying that they are often '**out of their depths**'.
- **Chapters 1 and 9:** As well as being able to conduct scientific experiments, he is multi-lingual (**Chapters 6 and 12**), a musician (**Chapter 8**), a sportsman (**Chapter 5**), a philosopher (**Chapters 2 and 7**) and a master of disguise – the seafarer (**Chapter 9**).
- **Chapters 9 and 12:** We learn he does not trust women and he says he will never marry.

Five key quotations

1. Holmes: 'My mind rebels at stagnation.'
2. Watson on Holmes: 'our companion maintained his impenetrable reserve'
3. Holmes: 'My dear Watson, try a little analysis yourself ... You know my methods. Apply them'
4. Holmes on the Smiths: 'The main thing with people of that sort ... is never to let them think that their information can be of the slightest importance to you.'
5. Watson: 'He ... busied himself all the evening in an abstruse chemical analysis which involved much heating of retorts and distilling of vapors'

Note it!

As Dr Watson is the **first-person narrator** of the story, we see Sherlock Holmes from his point of view. Without direct access to Holmes's thoughts and feelings, the reader learns about his **character** through the information Watson provides about him. He therefore remains an enigma.

Exam focus

How can I write about Sherlock Holmes's character? AO1

You can comment upon Holmes's relationship with other characters.

Holmes often sees it as his role to instruct others.

Conan Doyle shows that this is a particularly important part of his relationship with Dr Watson when, in Chapter 6, Holmes suggests Watson 'try a little analysis' himself.

Holmes goes on to add rather bluntly 'you know my methods. Apply them.' The use of the imperatives 'try' and 'apply' in Holmes's speech also reveals his impatience and arrogance to the reader.

Clear focus on character

Offers specific example

Provides further relevant support

Analysis of language explains effect on reader

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about Holmes's character. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Holmes's keen interest in the latest scientific methods is revealed by Conan Doyle when

THEMES Crime and justice

Five key things about the theme of crime and justice

1. **Sherlock Holmes** is a **new type of detective** whose **scientific methods** of solving crimes are shown to be very different to those the police use.
2. Holmes is initially consulted by **Miss Morstan** about a **mysterious letter** which mentions '**justice**'; the investigation which follows leads to the discovery of actual crimes such as the **death of Bartholomew Sholto** and the **theft of the Agra treasure**.
3. The **police force** is represented by **Athelney Jones** and his men; Holmes, however, prefers initially to use his own alternative police force of street children – the **Baker Street Irregulars**.
4. **Jonathan Small** seeks **justice for himself and his three associates**, namely the return of the stolen Agra treasure.
5. **The Four** have already been **convicted** and harshly punished – by transportation to the **convict colony of the Andaman Islands** – for the initial crime of stealing the treasure.

Where are crime and punishment significant in the story?

- The theft of the treasure results in three murders (Achmet, the convict guard and Bartholomew Sholto) plus other related deaths (Major Sholto, Captain Morstan and then Tonga in the river chase). This makes the criminal investigation far more dramatic for the reader.
- The motivation for the criminal acts in the **novel** is a desire for wealth. The treasure is therefore seen to be a corrupting and criminal influence.
- The ineffectiveness of the police force acts as a **counterpoint** to Holmes's investigation, thus highlighting his special powers.



How are ideas of justice explored?

- The fate of Small and his punishment raises questions about justice.
- The death of Captain Morstan, although accidental, appears unjust.
- By the end of the novel the crimes are solved, but the treasure is lost forever, perhaps representing a form of justice.

Five key quotations

1. Thaddeus's letter to Mary: **'You are a wronged woman, and shall have justice'**
2. Holmes: **'We shall work the case out independently, and leave this fellow Jones to exult over any mare's-nest which he may choose to construct.'**
3. Holmes on the Sign of the Four: **'a sign that it was not a common murder, but ... something in the nature of an act of justice'**
4. Holmes on the Baker Street Irregulars: **'They can go everywhere, see everything, overhear everyone.'**
5. Small to Jones: **'Where is the justice that I should give [the treasure] up to those who have never earned it?'**

Note it!

'Detectives' were first employed by the Metropolitan Police in the 1840s. In the novel the police detectives are initially presented as foolish, and it is only when Holmes joins forces with them (Chapter 10) that the criminals are caught.

Exam focus

How can I write about the theme of crime and justice? AO1

You can explore the theme of crime using the police.

Conan Doyle presents the theme of crime through the police's misguided investigation. After the murder, Holmes says he will work 'independently' and leave Athelney Jones 'to exult over any mare's-nest which he may choose to construct'. The use of the verb 'exult' suggests Jones's arrogance and the slang 'mare's-nest', meaning muddle, emphasises to the reader that these crimes will only be solved by Holmes, a detective with new rigorous methods.

Focus on the theme

Specific support through quotation

Analysis of language

Development of point

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about the theme of justice. Use one of the quotations from the list.

The Sign of the Four *itself* symbolises the theme of justice, as is shown