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## PART FOUR: THEMES, CONTEXTS AND SETTINGS

## Themes

## QUICK TEST



- 1 Complete this gap-fill paragraph about the **theme of friendship and loyalty**, adding the **correct or suitable information**:

'The Sign of the Four' presents a number of friendships and alliances, but the central relationship is between Holmes and ....., the narrator of the novella. They are very different .....: Holmes is ..... whereas Watson is more emotional in his responses. Watson will take great ..... for Holmes, and constantly expresses ..... at Holmes's abilities. Holmes is ..... towards Watson, for example lulling him to sleep by playing the violin. A friendship is destroyed with the betrayal of Major Sholto by ..... However, Jonathan Small also shows himself to be a loyal friend to the ....., and puts himself in great danger to fulfil their plans, ending in his arrest.

- 2 These comments by different characters suggest a particular **theme** in the novella. Choose the best **abstract noun** from the box below to identify the theme in each one:

- a) 'I caught one glimpse of his venomous, menacing eyes amid the white swirl of the waters.' (p. 97)  
Theme: .....
- b) 'Sherlock Holmes and I looked blankly at each other, and then burst simultaneously into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.' (p. 65)  
Theme: .....
- c) 'One month India lay as still and peaceful, to all appearance, as Surrey or Kent; the next there were two hundred thousand black devils let loose ...' (p. 110)  
Theme: .....
- d) 'The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls ...' (p. 24)  
Theme: .....
- e) 'I cared nothing for the law,- nothing for the gallows. To escape, to track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat,- that was my one thought.' (p. 127)  
Theme: .....

revenge

forgiveness

wealth

colonialism

justice

friendship

otherness

poverty

- 3 Write **two or three sentences** to show how quotations a) and b) in Question 2 reveal their themes. Include a **comment** on the **writer's effects**:

- a) Conan Doyle's description of the drowning Tonga ...  
.....  
.....
- b) Conan Doyle develops our understanding of the friendship between Holmes and Watson by ...  
.....  
.....

## THINKING MORE DEEPLY



- 4 Complete each statement about the **theme of crime**:

- a) Captain Morstan's crime of helping to steal the Agra treasure was committed out of ...  
.....  
.....
- b) Jonathan Small falls into a life of crime because ...  
.....  
.....
- c) Sherlock Holmes's approach to solving crime includes ...  
.....  
.....
- d) Major Sholto's crime of disposing of Captain Morstan's body has the effect of...  
.....  
.....



PROGRESS LOG [tick the correct box]

Needs more work Getting there Under control

# PART SIX: PROGRESS BOOSTER

## Expressing and explaining ideas A01

1 How well can you express your ideas about *The Sign of the Four*? Look at this grid and tick the level you think you are currently at:

Level	How you respond	What your spelling, punctuation and grammar are like	Tick
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You analyse the effect of specific words and phrases very closely (i.e. 'zooming in' on them and exploring their meaning).</li> <li>You select quotations very carefully and you embed them fluently in your sentences.</li> <li>You are persuasive and convincing in the points you make, often coming up with original ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You use a wide range of specialist terms (words like 'imagery'), excellent punctuation, accurate spelling, grammar, etc.</li> </ul>	
Mid/ Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You analyse some parts of the text closely, but not all the time.</li> <li>You support what you say with evidence and quotations, but sometimes your writing could be more fluent to read.</li> <li>You make relevant comments on the text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You use a good range of specialist terms, generally accurate punctuation, usually accurate spelling, grammar, etc.</li> </ul>	
Lower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You comment on some words and phrases but often you do not develop your ideas.</li> <li>You sometimes use quotations to back up what you say but they are not always well chosen.</li> <li>You mention the effect of certain words and phrases but these are not always relevant to the task.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You do not have a very wide range of specialist terms, but you have reasonably accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.</li> </ul>	

### SELECTING AND USING QUOTATIONS

2 Read these two samples from students' responses to a question about how Holmes is presented. Decide which of the three levels they fit best, i.e. **lower** (L), **mid** (M) or **high** (H):

**Student A:** *Holmes is fascinated rather than frightened by the brutal murder of Bartholomew Sholto. He talks to Watson about it with 'the air of a clinical professor expounding to his class'. This shows that he likes to explain things and does not talk about his feelings. This is something we find out more about later.*

Level?  Why? .....

**Student B:** *Conan Doyle demonstrates Holmes's detached personality using an interesting image when he discusses Bartholomew Sholto's brutal death with 'the air of a clinical professor expounding to his class'. A 'clinical professor' would be able to talk about death without showing any emotion and this leads the reader to see that Holmes is more interested in the facts of Bartholomew's death. The verb 'expounding' could suggest that Holmes is enjoying the discussion because he is speaking in some detail.*

Level:  Why? .....

### ZOOMING IN – YOUR TURN!

Here is the first part of another student response. The student has picked a good quotation but he hasn't 'zoomed in' on any particular words or phrases:

*When Watson, Holmes and Jones plan the capture of Jonathan Small and Tonga, Holmes says 'if we get to their lair' showing that he thinks Small might be hiding.*

3 Pick out one of the **words** or **phrases** the student has quoted and write a further sentence to complete the explanation:

The word/phrase '.....', as Holmes uses it, suggests .....

### EXPLAINING IDEAS

You need to be precise about the way Conan Doyle gets ideas across. This can be done by varying your use of verbs (not just using 'says' or 'means').

4 Read this paragraph from a **mid-level** response to a question about Watson's feelings towards Miss Morstan. Circle all the **verbs** that are repeated (not in the quotations):

*Conan Doyle shows us Watson's developing love for Miss Morstan when Watson says his 'heart turned as heavy as lead' after learning the treasure is worth half a million pounds. This shows that Watson feels anxious about the huge amount of money that Miss Morstan is set to inherit and says that he has incredibly strong feelings for her.*

5 Now **choose** some of the words below to replace your circled ones:

<i>suggests</i>	<i>implies</i>	<i>tells us</i>	<i>presents</i>	<i>signals</i>	<i>asks</i>
<i>demonstrates</i>	<i>recognises</i>	<i>comprehend</i>	<i>reveals</i>	<i>conveys</i>	

6 Rewrite your **high-level** version of the paragraph in full below. Remember to mention the **author by name** to show you understand he is **making choices** in how he presents characters, themes and events:

**PROGRESS LOG** [tick the correct box] Needs more work  Getting there  Under control