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SHERLOCK HOLMES, DEAD OR ALIVE?

What happens when an author gets tired of his most famous character and decides to 'kill' him? In many cases, the character's fans can get upset with the author. That is exactly what happened when Arthur Conan Doyle decided to kill Sherlock Holmes and stop writing detective stories.



When Fred Weasley from the Harry Potter series died, many young people looked for other fans online so that they could share their sadness. Do you like to share your sadness?

Why did Conan Doyle 'kill' Sherlock Holmes?

Arthur Conan Doyle wanted to write historical novels. He thought that detective stories were 'an elementary form of fiction', and that his famous creation was stopping him from writing other, more important work. So he decided to kill Sherlock Holmes by making him fall from Reichenbach Falls, in Switzerland, while fighting against one of his enemies, Moriarty. 'It was not murder,' he said, 'but self-defence'.



Sherlock Holmes dies

Holmes's death appeared in the story 'The Adventure of the Final Problem', published in December 1893 in *The Strand Magazine*. The reaction of the readers was incredible: 20,000 people stopped reading the magazine in protest! And city businessmen went on the streets wearing black arm bands to show their sadness.



THE DEATH OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.

Sherlock Holmes comes back to life

The public's response to this fictional death was so strong that Doyle had to bring the great detective back to life. This happened eight years later, in 1901, when 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' came out. It was not a 'real' return, however: the author made it clear that the story took place before the accident at the Falls. The real return of the hero happened two years later with the publication of 'The Adventure of the Empty House'.



Bringing characters back to life

How can a character come back to life after his or her death? It's easy, thanks to a narrative device that has become quite common both in books and cinema.



In groups, think of films and books where characters came back to life. Then tell the class how it was possible. Or read our suggestions at the bottom of the page!



GLOSSARY

- **accident:** bad event
- **black arm bands:** black part of clothing people wear to show sadness at someone's death
- **evidence:** something that makes you believe that something is true
- **murder:** act of killing someone
- **narrative device:** technique an author uses to give a special effect or result in writing (e.g. flashback, where the story is told from the end)
- **sadness:** state of being sad
- **self-defence:** action that saves one's self
- **upset:** sad and angry

Don't give details of the death. Don't show or identify the dead body. That way, readers think the character died, but there is no real evidence.

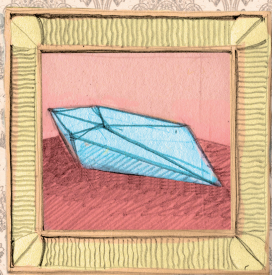
THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE



SHERLOCK
HOLMES



Dr WATSON





BRECKINRIDGE



MR HENRY BAKER



JOHN HORNER



JAMES RYDER



CATHERINE
GUSACK



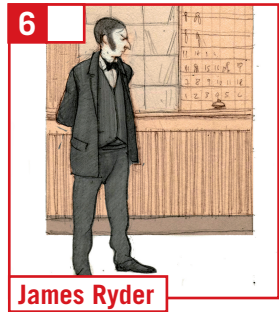
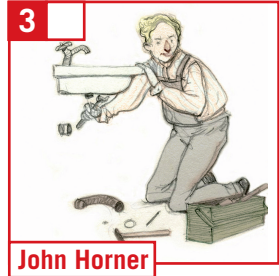
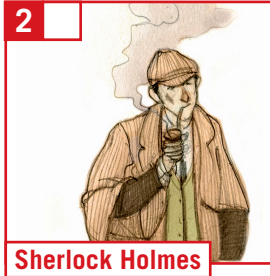
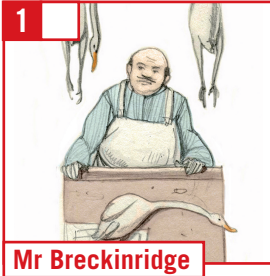
THE
COUNTESS
OF
MORCAR



PETERSON

BEFORE READING

1 Listen and match the descriptions to the characters. Label the pictures a-f.



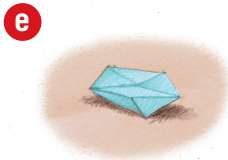
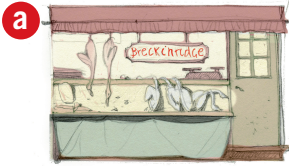
2 Listen again and answer the questions with the name of a character from Exercise 1.

- 1** Who goes to fix the Countess of Morcar's sink?
.....
- 2** Who finds Mr Henry Baker's hat in the street one night?
.....
- 3** Who has an important job at the hotel?
- 4** Who is a stallholder at Covent Garden Market in London?
.....
- 5** Who loses his hat and his Christmas goose in the street?
.....
- 6** Who finds the answer to the mystery of the blue carbuncle?



3 Match the words to the pictures.

magnifying glass dressing-gown
blue carbuncle hat goose market stall




4 Use the words from Exercise 3 to complete the sentences below.

- a** The police arrested John Horner for stealing the Countess of Morcar's
- b** Sherlock Holmes looked at the old with his
- c** Holmes and Watson went to Covent Garden to talk to Breckinridge at his
- d** Holmes often wears a purple when he is at home.
- e** Peterson's wife finds the blue carbuncle inside the



1 The old hat

 Two days after Christmas, I, Dr John Watson, went to the house of my friend, the famous detective Sherlock Holmes. Holmes was lying on the sofa in a purple dressing-gown, with a magnifying glass in his hand, and newspapers on the floor. Beside the sofa was a wooden chair, with an old hat on the back of it. The hat was dirty, and Holmes was looking at the hat through his magnifying glass.

‘Well, Holmes,’ I said, as I sat down by the fire, ‘why are you looking at this dirty old hat? Is it going to help you solve a crime?’

‘No, no. There’s no crime here,’ said Holmes, laughing.

‘But there’s a strange story about this hat. Do you know a man called Peterson, the doorman?’

‘Yes,’ I replied.

‘This hat belongs to Peterson,’ said Holmes.

‘So, is it Peterson’s hat?’ I asked him.



‘No, Peterson found it. He doesn’t know who owns it.’

‘How did the hat get here, Holmes?’ I asked.

‘It arrived on Christmas morning, together with a fat goose,’ said Holmes. ‘Peterson’s wife is now cooking the goose in front of the fire. These are the facts: about four o’clock on Christmas morning, Peterson was returning from a party. He was walking along Tottenham Court Road in the centre of London. In front of him, he saw a tall man carrying a white goose over his shoulder.

GLOSSARY

- **crime:** action that is against the law
- **doorman:** person who opens and closes doors in hotels, etc.
- **dressing-gown:** coat worn at home

- **goose:** 
- **magnifying glass:** 
- **owns:** has got
- **solve:** find the answer to

As Peterson arrived in Goodge Street, this tall man walking with a stick in front of him had an argument with a small group of young men. One of them took the man's hat off his head. The man used his stick to defend himself, and by mistake, broke the shop window behind him. Peterson ran to help the man, but the man was surprised at the broken window, and when he saw Peterson in his doorman's uniform, he thought he was a policeman. He dropped his goose and ran away. The young men ran, too, when they saw Peterson. So Peterson was alone in the street with this old hat and a wonderful Christmas goose.'

'Did he give the hat and the goose back to the tall man?' I asked.

'No, Watson, that's the problem,' said Holmes. 'There was a small card on the bird's left leg. On it were the words: "For Mrs Henry Baker". The initials "H.B." were inside the hat, but there are thousands of Bakers, and hundreds of Henry Bakers in London. So it's not easy to give back the hat and the goose.'

'So, what did Peterson do?' I asked.

'He brought the hat and the goose to me on Christmas morning, as he knows I love solving problems.'

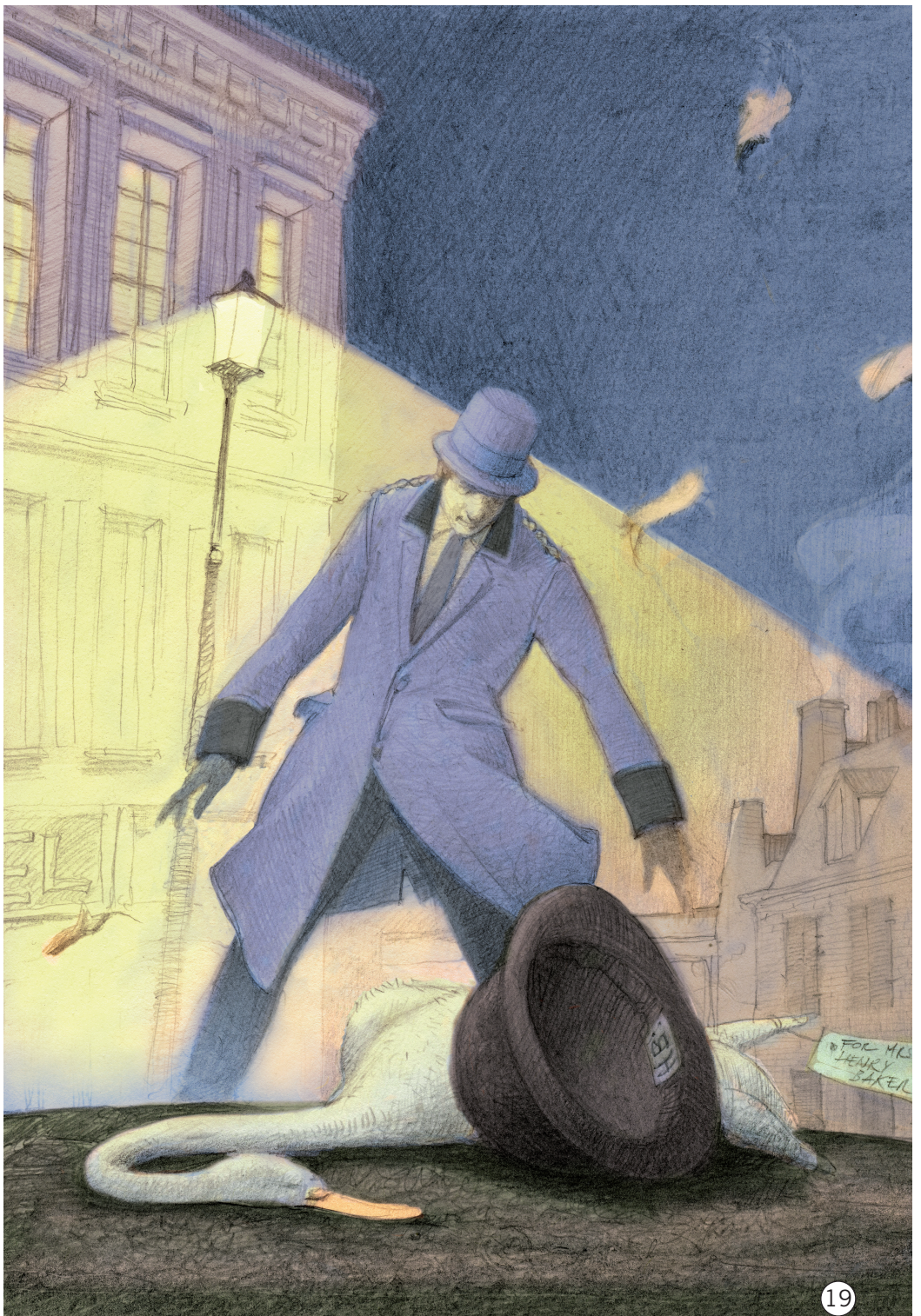
FIND

Imagine you find something valuable on the street.
What do you do? Tick (✓).

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take it to the police. | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep it. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leave it on the street. | <input type="checkbox"/> Try and give it back. |

GLOSSARY

- **argument:** fight with words
- **dropped:** let fall
- **initials:** first letters of a name
- **stick:** long piece of wood to help one walk



‘But, Holmes, what can this old hat tell you?’

‘Here is my magnifying glass, Watson. You know what I do. Look and see what *you* can find out about the man who wore this hat.’

I took the hat in my hands and turned it over. It was a very ordinary• black hat. It was round, hard, very old, and very dirty. There was no label• to show the maker’s name, but, as Holmes said, the initials “H. B.” were written on one side. It had brown stains• in several places. It also had black ink on it, to hide the stains.

‘I can’t see anything,’ I said, as I gave the hat back to Holmes.

‘No, Watson, you can see everything,’

Holmes replied. ‘But you can’t tell me what you see.’

‘So, Holmes, what can *you* tell from this hat?’

Holmes picked it up and looked at it in a strange, quiet way. This was typical of Holmes. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘There *are* some clues•. The man was very intelligent. Also, he was rich about three years ago. But he’s poor now. Perhaps he has a problem with alcohol.’

‘My dear Holmes!’ I said, surprised at the things Holmes knew.

Holmes continued, ‘He’s a man who doesn’t go out much, is middle-aged, has grey hair which was cut• a few days ago, and he puts a special cream on it. These are the facts his hat tells us. Also, he probably doesn’t have gas lighting• in his house.’



GLOSSARY

- **clues:** things that help solve a mystery
- **cut:** taken off with scissors
- **gas lighting:** old fashioned lighting before the invention of electricity

- **label:** 
- **ordinary:** normal; not unusual
- **stains:** dirty marks

‘You’re joking, Holmes,’ I said.

‘Not at all. Don’t you understand how I know this, Watson?’

‘Perhaps I am very stupid, but no, I don’t understand,’ I answered. ‘For example, how did you know this man was intelligent?’

As an answer, Holmes put the hat on his head. It was very big for his head.

‘The hat is quite large,’ he said, ‘the man has a large brain•, so he must have something in it.’

‘How do you know the man is not rich, then?’ I asked Holmes.

‘This hat is three years old. It’s the best quality. This man bought an expensive hat three years ago. He didn’t buy a hat after that, so he must now be poor.’

‘Go on.’

‘The other points, that he is middle-aged, that his hair is grey, that it was recently cut, and that he uses special cream, we can see from looking inside the hat. The magnifying glass shows a lot of hair-ends, cut by the scissors of the barber•. And there’s a strong smell of hair cream,’ said Holmes.

‘You have an answer for everything, Holmes,’ I said. ‘But how do you know that the man does not have gaslight in his house?’

‘There are more than five candle-wax stains, so there are a lot of candles• in his house,’ replied Holmes. ‘Are you happy now, Watson?’

-
- **barber:** man who cuts hair
 - **brain:** organ inside one’s head that controls thoughts and feelings

- **candles:** objects used to make light

AFTER READING TALK ABOUT THE STORY

1 Read each statement and circle the number that is most true for you.

1 = Not really **5** = Definitely

a It's a good story.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

b I had no problems understanding the story.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

c I now know lots of new words.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

d The pictures helped me understand the story.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

e I want to recommend the book to a friend.

1 **2** **3** **4** **5**

2 How did the blue carbuncle get from the jewel-case into the goose?

3 Who is your favourite character in the story? Who is your least favourite character? Why?

4 Do you feel sorry for any of the characters?

5  What do you think of the ending? Discuss in groups.

AFTER READING COMPREHENSION

1 Are the following sentences true (T) or false (F)? Tick (✓).

- | | T | F |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a When Watson visited Holmes just after Christmas, Holmes was looking at a dirty old hat. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b Peterson, a doorman, found the hat one morning at Paddington Station. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c Holmes looked at the hat and said its owner was a very intelligent man. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d Peterson came to see Holmes after his wife found the blue carbuncle inside a goose. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e <i>The Times</i> said that the Countess of Morcar lost the carbuncle while she was at the theatre. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f When Henry Baker came for his hat, he said that his goose came from the goose club at the Alpha Inn. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g Holmes and Watson visited Covent Garden for a secret meeting with Catherine Cusack, the countess's maid. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h When Holmes and Watson met James Ryder at Covent Garden Market, they took him back to Baker Street. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i Holmes told Ryder that Mr Henry Baker had the blue carbuncle. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j When Holmes showed Ryder the blue carbuncle, he begged for mercy and asked Holmes not to tell the police. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| k Ryder said he hid the carbuncle inside a white goose his sister was selling. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| l Holmes told Ryder he was calling the police immediately to arrest him for theft. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |