### STUDY GUIDE | 5-7TH GRADE





# HOMES & WATSON



#### Before the Show

Welcome to a fun new interpretation on the classic characters of Holmes and Watson from Sr. Arthur Conan Doyle! In this reimagination of classic mystery story and themes Sherlock Holmes and her friend Dr. Joan Watson solve various mysteries all in the post Covid streets of London.

A few reminders so that you and others can enjoy the play fully!

- Please make sure that you have completely turned off your cellphone, smart watch and any other device.
- No photography or video recording of any kind as the setting, artwork, set pieces and writing are considered to be intellectual property and may be under copyright protection.
- Please remain quiet during the play itself and save all conversations for the intermission or after the show! This is a live show not a short TikTok video!

#### About the Show

Synopsis: A modern take on the classic detective stories of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. American Joan Watson wasn't sure what she was getting herself into when she answered the advertisement for apartment 2B posted by landlady Mrs. Hudson at 221 Baker. She was just looking for a new place to live as she was making several changes in the spring of 2021, including moving to London. She

certainly wasn't expecting her first experience of her new roommate Sherlock Holmes to be dressed in a steampunk dream and wielding a fencing foil. As the story unfolds this odd couple solve crimes for Scotland Yard and eventually come face to face with the most cunning villain in the world. All with the look of what would happen to the detective story tropes when women are in charge.

#### Character Breakdowns

Sherlock Holmes: A once in a generation genius! She is often playing psychological 3D chess and is highly observant of things around her. She is blunt to a fault and often gets bored easily; she loves costumes!

#### Dr. Joan Watson: In

this retelling she is an American doctor who has moved to London after her divorce. Feels completely lost as she is looking to reinvent herself in her 30s/40s.

Irene Adler: One of the only people to be able to outsmart Ms. Holmes. Irene Adler has a keen mind, razor sharp wit and thrives on high society. Playing the same psychological 3D chess games as Holmes, she is someone whose charm, confidence and wit makes her impossible to ignore.

Mrs. Hudson: The long suffering 60 something old landlady of Ms. Holmes and

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Ms. Watson. She generally looks out for the best interest of both the characters. And often finds herself both exasperated and amused by Holmes' antics.

Moriarty: The "Napoleon of Crime" a blackmailer and criminal mastermind so impressive at covering his tracks that you have never heard of him. He becomes Ms. Holmes' greatest rival.

**Inspector Lestrade:** A new and inexperienced inspector at Scotland Yard. He is very by the books and unimaginative in his thinking.

#### Key Themes/Vocab

Feminism: Belief that people of all genders should have rights, opportunities, and respect. For instance, if men and women do the same job; they should be paid the same.

Foil: A character who contrasts with the protagonist/antagonist. Showing traits that are very different from them.

Tropes: A common or overused theme or device, often a pattern or theme that the audience will notice across several stories. *Ms. Holmes and Ms. Watson* often follows some of the classic mystery tropes that appear below as well as **subverting** (using the typical trope in such a way it goes against the audience's expectation) some of them.

- **Gender-flipped characters:** Taking the lead roles in a a story that are men and retelling it with women in the lead roles.
- Brilliant Detective and the "Watson"/

Sidekick (see Appendix 1 for explanation and examples): Holmes is brilliant but cold. Watson is relatable and empathetic. Watson asks the questions we are thinking as the audience.

- Lone Wolf: Holmes is used to working alone. She is successful but is harsh and often misses social cues that end up hurting others. Watson brings empathy and emotional intelligence. Showing that Holmes needs Watson to make an epic team!
- Damsel in Distress: This play flips this trope with the character of Irene Adler.
   She is not a woman who exists just to be saved. She's intelligent, powerful and can save herself!

### The World of the Play

Setting: London, England 2021 Apartment 2B at Number 221 Baker Street. Right after the Covid lockdown

**Tone:** This play is full of costumes and disguises funny, fast paced, and fun! Most mysteries are darker and more serious!

#### Authors:

Kate Hamill (Ms. Holmes and Ms. Watson - Apt. 2B) is an actor and a playwright from 2017 - present. Common themes that run throughout her plays are absurdist humor, social and gender issues as well as creating more complicated female characters.

According to her website, she does this

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by creating "new feminist, female centered classics", either through adapting existing stories such as Holmes and Watson. Or creating whole new plays. In 2017 she was named *Wall Street Journal's* Playwright of the Year and from then to 2024 she was in the top 10 most produced playwrights in the United States with taking the top spot in 2025.

**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle** (1859-1930) most famous for his characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson first appeared in 1887's *A Study in Scarlet*. Doyle was an author, activist, and Doctor. Over a span of forty years he wrote four complete novels and fifty-six short

stories about the duo. Including 1893's short story *The Final Problem*. In which he tried to kill off the character of Holmes by having him and Moriarty fall over the Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland. Due to public backlash, Doyle revived his famous detective. Outside of Holmes he wrote Historical Fiction, Sci-fi and gothic horror.

### Discussion Questions Pre Show:

What has been a time that you had to



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think "outside the box" in order to solve a problem?

- In Appendix 1 there are some examples of the Genius/Sidekick Tropes in mysteries. Are there any that aren't listed that you might already be familiar with?
- What are some adaptations of Sherlock Holmes that you are already familiar with?

#### **Post Show**

- How do classic stories change when the author changes key elements like the gender of the typical characters?
   Settings? Provide specific evidence from this play and others that you may already be familiar with to support your answer.
- How do Holmes and Watson balance each other out? Provide specific evidence from this play to support your answer.
- Which character surprised you the most and why?
- What was predictable about the play?
   What did you not see coming and caught you off guard?
- What moments did Watson solve part of the mystery when Holmes could not.
   Why is this an important example of their teamwork? Provide specific evidence from this play.

#### **Extension Activities**

- Go to a website like <u>www.tvtropes.</u>
   org and look up Mystery tropes. If you
   were to write a modern story (detective,
   romance, fantasy, etc), what is a trope
   that you would want to subvert and why?
- Now go write it a short scene subverting this trope!
- Storyboard a scene from the play or write something that comes next! Include slapstick humor and mystery elements.
- Have a debate: Which character was the cleverest in the play? (Holmes, Watson, Adler, or Moriarty) and why?
- Does intelligence only mean being smart and able to solve things or are empathy, creativity, emotion, and the ability to collaborate well also a type of brilliance? Use evidence from the play to support your claim.
- Read a traditional Holmes story and compare and contrast the characters from the play.

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Appendix 1: Chart of common Genius Detective/Sidekicks Trope in Literature and on Screen

DETECTIVE	SIDEKICK	ROLE	WHAT THE SIDEKICK ADDS
Sherlock Holmes (Sherlock Holmes)	John/Joan Watson	Doctor, often has a military background, loyal to Holmes	Emotional ground- ing, Stand in for the Audience Cri- tiques and calls out Holmes from being cold and emotionless
Hercule Poirot (Poirot by Dame Agatha Christie)	Captain Haistings	Loyal, but naïve.	Highlights Poirot's brilliance and pro- vides humor to the mystery's
Nero Wolfe (Nero Wolfe by Rex Stout)	Archie Goodwin	Street-smart and action oriented	The person who goes out and investigates and relays information to the homebound detective.
Batman/ Bruce Wayne	All the Robins Alfred Pennyworth	Robin is the idealis- tic youth Alfred is the father figure	They both humanize Batman.
Jack Reacher (Reacher by Lee Child)	Neagley	Neagley the competent protegee who often helps on the case	Grounds the lone wolf character and gives him a friend to care about.
Shawn Spencer (Psych)	Burton "Gus" Guster	Loyal, Intelligent, is an active agent in the mysteries and often completes the missing piece. The responsible Skeptic	Comedic foil to Shawn Spencer. Balances logic and emotion and chaos. Subverts the trope by treating the au- dience as intelligent and rational.



#### **Bibliography**

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