STUDY GUIDE | 8-12TH GRADE







Before the Show

Welcome to a bold 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!

About the Show

Synopsis: A dark comedic 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 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: The belief in social, political and economic equality regardless of gender. It challenges the existing power structures that have been held by men and how to move forward towards a society where gender does not limit what someone can do or become.

Foil: A character who contrasts with the protagonist/antagonist.

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: In this play the author Katie Hamill takes a look at the classic tale of Holmes and Watson. However instead of just changing the genders of the central characters and being done. She instead places both Holmes and Watson center stage and uses the way that they are both active participants in the mystery to challenge the notion that adventure, intelligence, crime fighting are exclusive to men only.

- Brilliant Detective and the "Watson"/ Sidekick (see Appendix 1 for explanation and examples): Often in mysteries there is the Genius Detective. They are distant, cold, often emotionless and ruled by logic. The counter balance to that is their side kick that takes on the role of every person. Dropped into the story and often asks the obvious questions or makes remarks that gives the chance for the detective to show off their brilliance. However, their best quality is that they ground the detective back into humanity with empathy and compassion for the people that are often
- Lone Wolf: The setting of this play in 2021 helps to demonstrate just how much the solitary detective of Holmes needs Watson. Holmes isn't detached and alone going off at things by herself. She needs her friend that she brings in and works with her. This isnt the story of

blown past.

a "strong person" who uses logic and is by themselves. Instead each partner has different strengths (logic/brilliance and empathy/humanity) . Which makes the team fully work

• Damsel in Distress: The subversion of this trope happens in the character of Irene Adler. Often in stories there is a female character who exists to just be saved. Irene Adler is the opposite of this. She has no need to be rescued at all as she is in control, and often 2-3 steps ahead of everyone else. Her sharp wit plays as a foil to Holmes in intelligence and independence.

The World Of the Play

Setting: London, England 2021 Apartment 2B at Number 221 Baker Street.

Right after the Lockdown of Covid. Joan Watson has left NYC previously and has been traveling around trying to decide what she should do with her life before reading the advertisement for the apartment.

Tone: Traditionally mysteries with a Sherlock character are serious and intellectual. This is not that. It's fun! It's comedic and most importantly they use disguises and humor! Proving that humor and intelligence can coexist!





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 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

- How do classic stories change when the author changes key elements like the gender of the typical characters? Settings?
- What has been a time that you had to 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 complement each other? Provide specific evidence from this play to support your answer.
- Which character surprised you the most and why?
- How are gender roles addressed in the play? Did this change how you viewed the characters' choices?
- 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.
- How do the different strengths that Holmes and Watson have, mirror struggles in real life teamwork?

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.



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 grounding, Stand in for the Audience Critiques 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 idealistic 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 audience as intelligent and rational.

Bibliography

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