

How to be a literary detective

'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' by Arthur Conan Doyle

Sherlock Holmes and how to be a literary detective! Look carefully through Helen Stoner's account and spot the important clues she gives about the events that night. There are at least 10 to find. Then fill in what you can work out from each clue (deduction).

Clue (what happened that night)	Deduction (why this might be important to either the story or to Holmes)
1. Feeling of impending misfortune	
2. Stormy night	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

Helen Stoner's account of the night her sister died

"I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so closely allied. It was a wild night. The wind was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing against the windows. Suddenly, amid all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. I knew that it was my sister's voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen. As I ran down the passage, my sister's door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I stared at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By the light of the corridor-lamp I saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with terror, her hands groping for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground. She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were dreadfully convulsed. At first I thought that she had not recognized me, but as I bent over her she suddenly shrieked out in a voice which I shall never forget, 'Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!' There was something else which she would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion seized her and choked her words. I rushed out, calling loudly for my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat and sent for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain, for she slowly sank and died without having recovered her consciousness. Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister."

The Literary detective!

So far you have, like Sherlock Holmes, learnt **how to make deductions** about characters and situations by finding small details and writing what these details suggest.

When you do your literary detective work, you need to be able to present your findings well. To do this you need a system.

When you are faced with a literary mystery to solve in the form of a question, the first thing you must do is your detective work. We have filled in tables, and if you were under pressure to get the mystery solved (let's say in an examination!) you would need to work quickly.

You then need to present your evidence clearly. Here is how you should do it:

1. Introduce the evidence.

When Helen Stoner tells us about what happened that night, she tells us of how her sister's face had turned white.

2. Write the evidence down exactly. To do this you will need to use quotation marks.

We are told that "she saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with terror."

3. The important bit! Write what you have deduced or worked out from this clue.

Use expressions like:

- This might suggest that...
- The impression we are given is that...
- This shows that...
- This indicates that...
- This implies that...
- This hints at the fact that...

You get the idea!

This might suggest that her sister has had a terrible fright or is in shock from some kind of injury.

Of course, when you are doing your detective work, you need to take an intelligent guess. As long as you do that, you have passed the test – you are a good literary detective.

'Elementary, my dear Watson.'