

The Hound of the Baskervilles

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For the novel by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Study Guide



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Synopsis

Sir Charles Baskerville, squire of the ancient Baskerville estate in West England, has died under mysterious circumstances. His friend and neighbor, Dr. Mortimer, fears for the safety of Sir Henry Baskerville, the young man who will inherit the Baskerville title, ancestral home, and great fortune. Mortimer also worries that Sir Charles' death may be connected to an old family legend about a giant, demonic Hound said to haunt the Baskervilles as judgment for the sins of an ancient ancestor.

In London, Mortimer enlists the help of the famous consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes, and Holmes' associate, Dr. Watson, to help keep Sir Henry safe. A strange letter of warning and a stealthy and determined stalker soon convince Holmes that Sir Henry truly is in grave danger.

Holmes sends Watson to accompany Sir Henry to Baskerville Hall. There, on the vast and bleak moor surrounding Baskerville Hall, Watson discovers an eclectic community including the family's long-time servants the Barrymores, the Mortimers, Mr. Frankland, and Jack Stapleton, an amateur naturalist who lives on the moor with his sister Beryl—some of whom received a considerable inheritance from Sir Charles' death. Slowly, Watson finds himself entangled in an intricate web of secrets and terror. Can he and Holmes discover the truth about Sir Charles' death before the same fate, or worse, befalls Sir Henry?

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15. _____ Near the end of Chapter 1, Dr. Mortimer says to Holmes,

“A cast of your skull, sir, until the original is available, would be an ornament to any anthropological museum. It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet your skull.”

Many words have several definitions, and it is only by *context*, looking at the words and statements around a word, that we can figure out the correct definition for that usage. For example, the following definitions for *fulsome* are all correct, but one fits in the context in which Dr. Mortimer uses it. Write the letter from the correct definition in the blank above.

- a. generous, abundant
- b. offensive, disgusting
- c. excessively complimentary or flattering

Why did you choose the definition you did? Can you see another definition that might also fit?

Elements of Logical Thinking

“I never guess. It is a shocking habit—destructive to the logical faculty.”

—Sherlock Holmes, *The Sign of Four* (1890)

1. Sherlock Holmes prizes logical thinking above all (except, on some occasions, mercy). The first three chapters of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* introduce several key words related to logical thinking. Define each, then write a short paragraph using the words to describe logical thought.

- observation

- hypothesis

- inference

- deduction

- to surmise

- fallacy

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Write a character description (five to seven sentences) describing Sherlock Holmes as he is characterized in these three chapters. Use at least two examples from the book.

8. What do readers learn about Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson from their examination and discussion of Mortimer's walking stick? What does this reveal about their relationship?
9. Near the end of Chapter 1, Dr. Mortimer characterizes himself as "an unpractical man" and although to "the man of precisely scientific mind" Holmes is "the second highest intellect in Europe," he says "as a practical man of affairs" Holmes stands alone. Based on the context of the surrounding paragraphs, what distinction is Dr. Mortimer drawing between himself and Monsieur Bertillon and Holmes—what does being "practical" mean? Why does Dr. Mortimer come to Holmes if he is the "the second highest expert in Europe"?
10. Authors frequently repeat vowel and consonant sounds for emphasis and beauty. The repetition of consonant sounds at the *beginning* of words is called *alliteration*; the repetition of consonant sounds in the *middle* of words is called *consonance*, and the repetition of *vowel sounds* is called *assonance*. For the following passages, underline the repeated sounds and then write whether the sounds are alliteration, consonance, or assonance. Some passages may have multiple types of repetition.
 - a. "Most modern. A most practical, pressing matter, which must be decided within twenty-four hours."
 - b. "But it was not the sight of her body, nor yet was it that of the body of Hugo Baskerville lying near her, which raised the hair on the heads of these daredevil roysterers...."
 - c. "... a man of science shrinks from placing himself in the public position of seeming to indorse a popular superstition."

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11. Near the end of Chapter 3, Sherlock Holmes asserts, “The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.” What does he mean? What makes observation an important element of logical thinking? How can people sharpen their powers of observation?
12. Sometimes an author will use *repetition* in a work to draw attention to or emphasize a thought or action. Near the end of Chapter 3, Holmes asks Watson, “Why should a man walk on tiptoe down the alley?” In his explanation to Watson, what word does Holmes repeat? What is the author communicating or emphasizing by repeating this word?

Dig Deeper:

13. Dr. Watson admires Sherlock Holmes, even though Holmes’ apparent indifference to Watson’s admiration has bothered him. What about Holmes do you find admirable or less than admirable, and why? Support your answer with specific references to the text.

In real life, whom do you admire, and why? Read Psalm 1; Mark 10:41–45; 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15; Hebrews 11:13–16. According to these scriptures, who deserves admiration from God’s people?

14. It can be easy for people (like the Baskervilles) to assume that their own or someone else’s misfortune is punishment from God caused by sin in their life—after all, Exodus 34:5–7 and Romans 1:18 clearly say that God will punish wrongdoers and wickedness. We even see demonstrations of this in passages such as Judges 2:12–15. However, reading such passages as Ecclesiastes 9:11; John 9:1–3, 16:33; Romans 5:3–4; 1 Peter 1:6–7, 4:12–13, 19 paints a different picture of

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where suffering comes from and its purpose in our lives. Given these different scriptures, how should we judge misfortune and trouble in people's lives, including our own? What assumptions should we be making?

15. In Chapter 3, Holmes says, "In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious." In other stories, Holmes describes himself as "the court of last appeal" for those who need assistance ("The Five Orange Pips"), and declares, "It's every man's business to see justice done" ("The Adventure of the Crooked Man"). In what ways can Holmes' work as a detective be seen as "combatting evil?" In what similar and different ways do Christians "take on the Father of Evil" in their own lives? Consider Deuteronomy 16:18–20, James 1:27, and Ephesians 6:10–18.
16. Although scripture does not include "detectives" or "scientists" in the modern sense among its characters, some people do exercise similar powers of observation. Read about King Solomon in 1 Kings 4:29–34, King David, the psalmist, in Psalm 8; and the Magi in Matthew 2. How do these biblical people demonstrate their powers of observation? What role did their observations play in their relationship to God?

Optional Activities

1. *Research paper:* Dr. Mortimer is a student of phrenology, which "enjoyed great popular appeal well into the 20th century but has since been wholly discredited by scientific research." (www.britannica.com/topic/phrenology). Research and write a 1–2 page essay about phrenology, addressing: 1) what it was; 2) how further scientific research discredited it; and 3) how the rise and fall of phrenology illustrates the nature of scientific research.

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them. On the other hand, he tells us we need to be discerning about what others will hear from us, and we need to not listen to false prophets; we can tell them by the fruits of their actions. Clearly there is a paradox here, because on the one hand Jesus is telling us to not judge others, then he tells us to “not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs,” and calls “false prophets ... ferocious wolves ... [that] bear bad fruit.” That sounds pretty judgmental! Students’ interpretations may vary. The clearest interpretation is that 1) we will be held accountable for the way we treat others and we will be treated in the same way, and 2) there are things that are clearly right and wrong and we need to be able to recognize them as such. People who are false prophets and abuse the word of God need to be recognized as such and dealt with by the Church. Matthew 10:16 offers a clear method of approaching such things. We are told to be “as shrewd as snakes” (we are to understand and recognize the actions of wolves) but “as innocent as doves” (we are to be completely innocent of actually acting in those ways). We are to be sheep, but smart sheep who do not get eaten by the wolves around us and possibly sheep who can at times send the wolves into retreat without becoming or acting like wolves ourselves. In relation to Selden, though we see in the previous question that we are not to treat such people poorly, these verses also make clear that we are to use common sense in how vulnerable we make ourselves and others to “wolves.” While we show kindness and compassion, we should not let vulnerable people be preyed upon.

15. Answers will vary. Watson’s interactions with the Stapletons seem strange from the moment that Beryl arrives. She is agitated and adamant that he leave, and when Jack arrives, the interactions between Beryl and Jack also seem strange. Jack’s greeting to Beryl “was not altogether a cordial one,” he looks back and forth from Watson to Beryl and he looks at her with “questioning eyes.” When Beryl says she is “Quite happy,” she speaks with “no ring of conviction.” After Watson leaves their home, she rushes to intercept him to ask him to not say anything about their earlier conversation. Something seems very off between the Stapletons. He seems to not trust her, and she seems to have something to hide from him. There is an as yet unexplained tension.

Chapters 8–10

Vocabulary:

1. harried: harassed or attacked; 2. approbation: approval; 3. onerous: troublesome, burdensome; 4. choleric: bad tempered, irritable; 5. forfeit: lose; 6. furtive: secretive, stealthy, guilty; 7. perplexity: confusion, inability to understand; 8. gesticulated: gestured dramatically; 9. unmitigated: absolute, total; 10. strident: intense, shrill, harsh; 11. inscrutable: impenetrable, impossible to interpret; 12. indelibly: cannot be changed or removed

Questions:

1. Watson sees Barrymore enter an empty, out-of-the-way room and look out a western window for several minutes, holding a candle to the window. They later learn that Barrymore has been using candles to communicate with Selden, who is his wife’s brother. The signals let Barrymore know that Selden is still around and Barrymore needs to take food to him on the moor.
2. Watson sees Sir Henry and Beryl engage in close conversation, interrupted angrily by Stapleton. He sees Stapleton and Sir Henry argue, and Beryl leave the scene with Stapleton. Sir Henry wanted to express his feelings for Beryl, but he says she would not talk about love but instead repeatedly warned him to leave Baskerville Hall and the moor. Stapleton later claims he was so angry because Beryl “is everything in his life,” and that losing his sister would be “a blow to him.” He said it had not occurred to him that Sir Henry was developing feelings for Beryl, though Watson had earlier noticed that Stapleton already seemed to be attempting to thwart their relationship.
3. Selden is a wanted, convicted criminal, “a danger to the community,” and they view it as their duty to capture him to protect others in the community. Watson thinks Sir Henry also may be motivated by a particular concern for the Stapletons’ safety because of his attraction to Beryl.
4. While pursuing Selden, Sir Henry and Watson hear the same loud, low cry Watson heard in Chapter 7. Sir Henry is certain it is a hound’s cry and he associates it with the Baskerville family legend.
5. Watson sees the silhouette of a tall, thin man, who he knows is not Selden, standing on a tor. Watson is convinced finding this man is the key to solving all the mysteries of the investigation: “If I could lay my hands upon that man, then at last we might find ourselves at the end of all our difficulties.” He seems to believe it may be the man from London.
6. According to Barrymore, “L.L.” wrote a note to Sir Charles asking him to meet her on the night he died. She seems to be Laura Lyons, Frankland’s daughter, who married an artist who later abandoned her. Stapleton, Sir Charles, and Mortimer helped her get enough money to start a career as a typist.