

Characters

Circle the character you will play. *Indicates large speaking role

***Stage Directors 1, 2 & 3** (SD1, SD2, SD3)

***Dr. John Watson**, Holmes's roommate and friend

***Sherlock Holmes**, a famous detective

Mrs. Hudson, Holmes's landlady

***Helen Stoner**, a young woman

Julia Stoner, Helen's twin sister

Dr. Grimesby Roylott, Helen's stepfather

As You Read

How does Holmes solve the case?

Scene 1

London, England, 1883

SD1: The curtain rises on a cluttered sitting room. Books and papers litter every surface, including the floor. Test tubes and beakers are crowded on a small table.

SD2: In two worn armchairs sit Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson, drinking coffee.

SD3: Watson, a handsome man with a small mustache, rubs his palms together and looks brightly at Holmes.

Watson: Well, Holmes, what is on the schedule today?

SD1: Holmes is a tall, thin man with piercing eyes and a hawklike nose. He frowns.

Holmes: It's looking to be a perfectly boring day. I've no cases to solve.

Hudson (knocking on the door): Holmes? Watson?

Holmes: Yes, Mrs. Hudson! Come in.

SD2: Mrs. Hudson enters the room and looks around.

Hudson: How can you live with this mess? And (wrinkling her nose) what is that smell?

Watson: You know, I've been wondering that as well.

Holmes: Oh, just some dead rats. Part of an experiment.

Hudson: Good heavens! Why did I ever let you rent the second floor of my building?

Holmes (smiling): Ah, but what would 221B Baker Street be without me, Mrs. Hudson?

Hudson: Tidy! (fondly) But I suppose it wouldn't be the same without you. Oh! I came to tell you that a young woman is here to see you. She seems quite **distraught**.

Holmes (excited): Does she? Please show her up.

SD3: Mrs. Hudson leaves. Watson is opening the windows when Helen Stoner appears in the doorway. She is dressed in black, and her panicked eyes are like those of a hunted animal.

Holmes: Hello, madam! Please come in. I will get you a cup of hot coffee; I see you are shivering.

Helen: It is not cold that makes me shiver. It is terror.

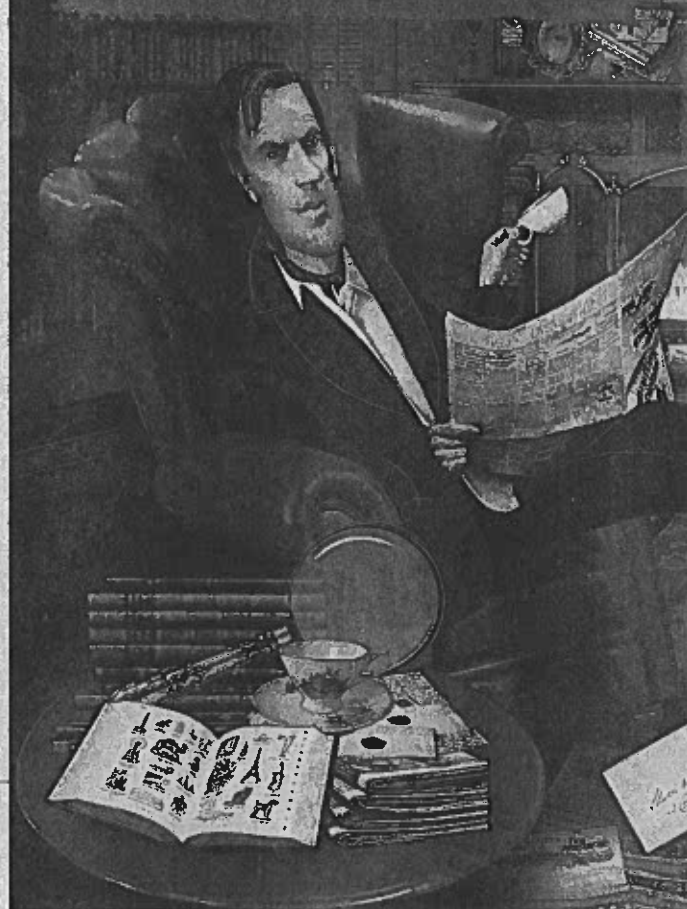
Holmes: Please, tell us what brought you here.

Helen: They say you are a great detective, Mr. Holmes—the best. I hope you can help me.

Holmes: I'm sure I can. This, by the way, is my

Crime Fighting

In late-1800s London, police officers investigated crimes by interviewing witnesses. They also rounded up known criminals and tried to get them to confess. Many crimes went unsolved. The fictional character Sherlock Holmes solved crimes differently—he used science and logic. He searched for clues at crime scenes, such as fingerprints and bloodstains. Today this method of crime solving is called forensic science.



associate Dr. John Watson. You can trust him completely. Now start at the beginning.

Helen: My name is Helen Stoner. I live with my stepfather, Dr. Grimesby Roylott.

Watson: The Roylott family is one of the oldest and richest in England, is it not?

Helen: Oldest, yes. Richest, no—at least not anymore. The Roylotts lost their fortune many years ago.

Holmes: How did Dr. Roylott become your stepfather?

Helen: After my father died, my mother was living in India. So was Dr. Roylott. That's where they met. They married when my sister and I were 2 years old.

Holmes: Your sister?

Helen: Yes, my twin sister, Julia. Eight years ago, we all moved back to England. Then my mother died in a train accident. Dr. Roylott gave up his medical practice and took Julia and me to live in the Roylott family home.

Watson: Your stepfather has no job? How do you live?

Helen: My mother left us money to live comfortably. But

Dr. Roylott is a nightmare! He has a terrible temper. His only friends are a baboon and a cheetah.

Watson: These wild animals run free on the grounds?!

Helen: Yes. He has a passion for animals from India.

Holmes: And where is your sister now?

SD1: Helen lifts a handkerchief to her eye.

Helen: Two years ago, Julia met a strange and terrible death, just two weeks before her wedding...

SD2: The stage lights fade.

Scene 2

Flashback to the Roylott Estate, England, 1881

SD3: The lights come up on a large stone house.

SD1: The house is grand but shows signs of neglect: The windows are dirty, the stones are crumbling, and weeds crowd the front garden.

SD2: The wind howls. Rain beats against the windows.

SD3: The front of the house lifts away, revealing three bedrooms connected by a hallway.

SD1: The room on the far right—Dr. Roylott's—is dark.

SD2: The middle room—Julia's—is bright but empty.

SD3: The room on the far left—Helen's—is also bright. In it, Julia and Helen talk quietly.

Julia: The past few nights, I've heard the strangest whistle around midnight.

Helen: Some sort of animal?

Julia: Perhaps... In any case, I'm sure it's nothing to worry about. It's late; I should let you get to sleep.

SD1: Julia returns to her room. She and Helen go to bed.

SD2: The stage lights dim. After a long silence, the village clock can be heard striking midnight.

Julia: AAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!

SD3: Helen leaps out of bed and runs into the hallway. She hears a low whistle and then a clanging sound.

SD1: Julia opens her door, her face contorted in horror.

Julia: It was the band! The speckled band!

SD2: Julia falls to the floor.

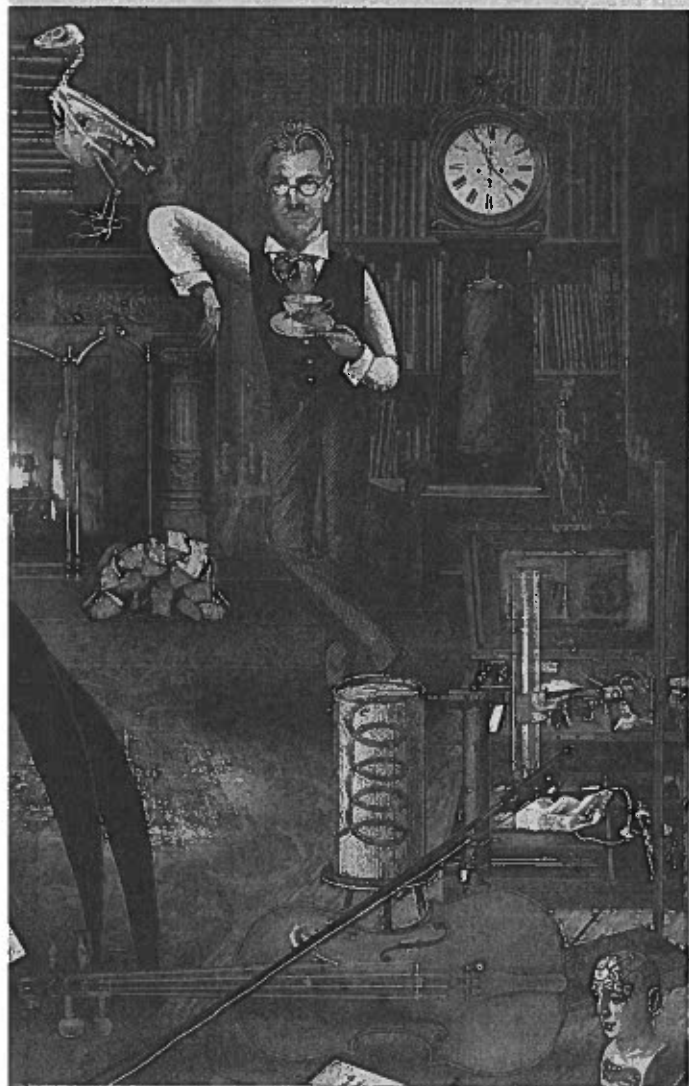
Helen: Help! Help!

Roylott (coming to Julia's side): She is dead.

Scene 3

Return to London, England, 1883

SD3: The lights come up on Holmes's sitting room.



Helen: A burnt match was found in Julia's right hand, and in her left, a matchbox.

Holmes: She must have struck a match to see something. Were the doors and windows locked?

Helen: Yes. With the cheetah and the baboon prowling about, we always locked them.

Holmes: I see. What did the coroner discover?

Helen: Nothing. There wasn't a mark on her body. And no evidence of poison.

Holmes: What do you think killed your sister?

Helen: I believe she died of pure fright—though what frightened her I do not know.

Holmes: What did she mean by "the speckled band"?

Helen: Maybe a waistband on a skirt? Or a ring of some sort? I really have no idea.

Holmes (shaking his head): These are very deep waters. Please continue your story.

Helen: The past two years have been lonely. But a month ago, some joy came into my life: I got engaged.

Watson: Congratulations.

Helen: Thank you. But I am afraid. You see, I had to move into Julia's old room because Dr. Roylott insisted that some repairs be made to my room. Last night, I heard that low whistle. Whatever killed Julia is after me!

Watson: Don't worry, Miss Stoner. This is just the sort of thing that Sherlock excels at figuring out.

Helen: I hope so.

Holmes: Miss Stoner, would we be able to inspect the house without your stepfather knowing?

Helen: Yes. In fact, he said he was going to town today.

Holmes: We will come to your house this afternoon.

Helen: Thank you.

SD1: Helen exits.

Holmes: Watson, Miss Stoner is in grave danger.

Watson: From whom? Or what?

SD2: Suddenly, the door flies open and an enormous man bursts in. He wears a top hat and a fancy coat.

SD3: He glares at Holmes and Watson.

Roylott: Which one of you is Holmes?

Holmes: That would be me. And you are?

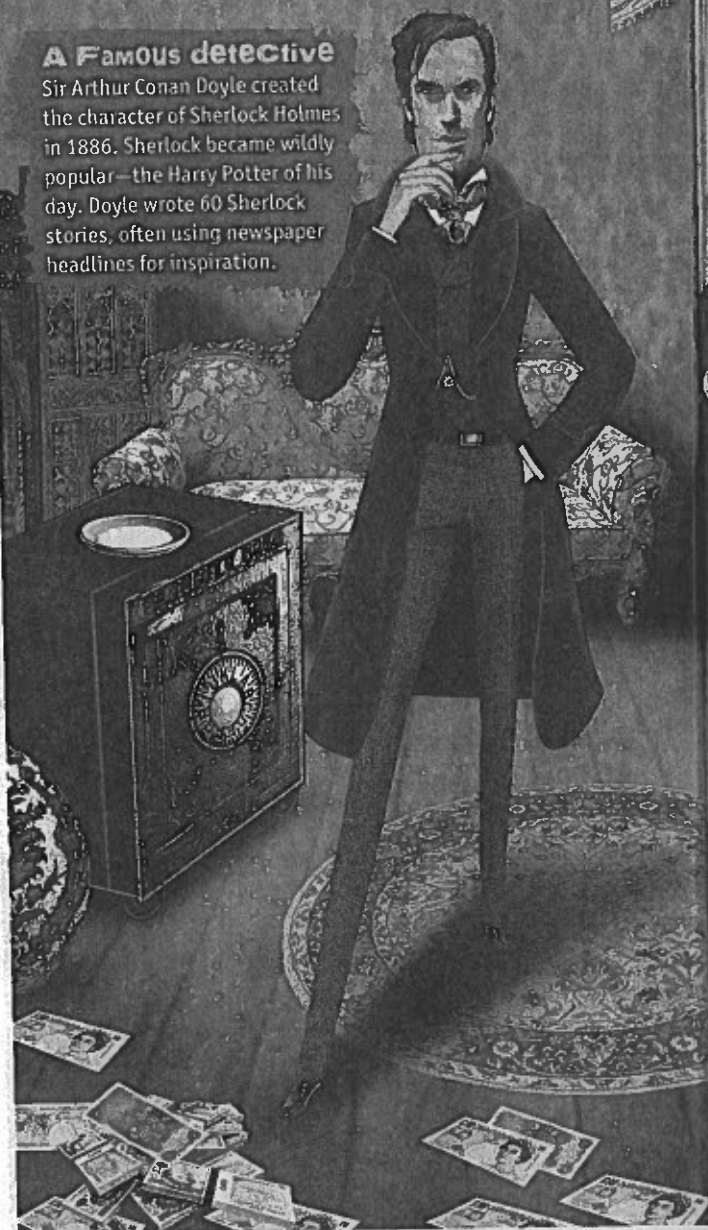
SD1: Mrs. Hudson rushes breathlessly into the room.

Hudson: I tried to stop this man, but he pushed in.

Holmes: We were about to find out who this man is.

A Famous detective

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created the character of Sherlock Holmes in 1886. Sherlock became wildly popular—the Harry Potter of his day. Doyle wrote 60 Sherlock stories, often using newspaper headlines for inspiration.



Roylott: I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott. What did my stepdaughter tell you?

Watson: Your stepdaughter? Did you follow Miss Stoner here?

Roylott: I did, and what about it? Now answer me!

Holmes: It is chilly for this time of year, don't you think?

Roylott: Don't toy with me, Holmes!

Holmes: I do hope the spring flowers won't freeze.

Roylott: I am warning you . . .

SD2: Dr. Roylott grabs the steel poker from the fireplace and bends it in half.

Hudson: Oh, my!



Roylott: I am a dangerous man to cross. See that you keep yourself out of my grip.

Holmes: Do close the door on your way out.

SD3: Dr. Roylott throws down the poker and strides out.

Holmes: He seems like a pleasant fellow.

SD1: Watson tries to bend the poker back into shape, but cannot.

Watson: He seems like a very *strong* fellow.

Hudson: A dangerous fellow, if you ask me.

Holmes: Indeed.

Scene 4

The Roylott Estate,
that afternoon

SD2: Holmes and Watson arrive at the Roylott estate. Holmes is carrying a cane.

Watson: What is the cane for, Holmes?

Holmes: I thought it might come in handy.

Watson (puzzled): Ah . . . Say, where did you go this morning after Roylott left?

Holmes: I went to see the will of Miss Stoner's late mother. What I found was *illuminating*. The will states that Roylott is to receive his late wife's money only until Helen and Julia marry—then the money goes to them.

Watson: So if Julia and Helen had both married, Roylott would have been left penniless?

Holmes: Quite so.

Watson: So Roylott, not wanting to lose the money left to him, killed Julia—and now plans to kill Helen too.

Holmes: Precisely. The question is: how?

SD3: Holmes knocks on the front door.

Helen (opening the door): Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson.

Holmes: We haven't a moment to lose. Miss Stoner, go to Julia's room and lock the shutters.

SD1: Helen disappears into the house.

Holmes: Watson, give those shutters a try.

Watson (grunting): Rrr-ugh! Rrr-ugh!

Holmes: Come on, Watson, pull!

Watson: Rr-UGH! These shutters won't budge.

Holmes: That answers that. Let's check the rooms.

SD2: Once again, the front of the house lifts away. Helen leads Holmes and Watson to her room. There is a ladder against one wall and a few tools on the floor.

Holmes: Mmmhmm. Now to Julia's room, please.

SD3: They go to Julia's room.

SD1: Holmes silently examines the room.

SD2: Finally, he points at a bell rope hanging down the wall and onto the bed.

Holmes: Where is the bell that this rope rings?

Helen: In the housekeeper's room.

Holmes: Did your sister use it?

Helen: No. My stepfather put it in, but I don't know why.

Holmes: Watson, give that bell rope a tug, will you?

SD3: Watson pulls the rope.

Holmes: If you follow the cord with your eyes, you'll see it is fastened to a hook just above that *ventilator* in the corner. But it's a dummy—it isn't attached to any bell.

Watson: By Jove, you're right!

Holmes: And speaking of that ventilator, why does it open into the next room? A ventilator should open to the outdoors. The whole point of a ventilator is to bring fresh air into the room.

Helen: That ventilator was put in at the same time the bell rope was hung, a few years ago.

Holmes: Curious. A bell rope that signals no one and a ventilator that doesn't ventilate.

SD1: They go to Dr. Roylott's room, which contains a bed, a chair, and a safe with a saucer of milk on top.

Holmes: Have you seen inside Dr. Roylott's safe?

Helen: Just once. It was full of papers.

Holmes: And the milk? Do you have a cat?

Helen: No. I do not know what the milk is for.

SD2: Under the chair, Holmes spots a small whip. The

end of the whip is formed into a loop.

Watson: Why tie it in this loop?

SD3: Holmes is lost in thought.

Holmes: Miss Stoner, when your stepfather returns, tell him you are ill. Pretend to go to Julia's room, but go to your old room and lock the door. Watson and I will spend the night in Julia's room.

Helen: You will?

Watson: We will?

Helen: All right, Mr. Holmes. I will do as you instruct.

SD1: Helen exits.

Holmes: Watson, don't feel you must stay. This may be quite dangerous.

Watson: If I can help, I am glad to stay.

Holmes: Thank you, Watson. We shall have horrors enough before the night is over, and your service may be invaluable.

Scene 5

The Roylott Estate, later that night

SD2: The three bedrooms are dark.

SD3: The voices of Holmes and Watson can be heard from the middle bedroom.

Holmes (whispering): Stay alert, Watson. Your life depends on it.

SD1: Offstage, the village clock chimes midnight.

SD2: Then there is a sound like a soft rushing of air.

SD3: Holmes strikes a match. Before it burns out, the audience sees Holmes spring from his seat and begin beating at the bell rope with his cane.

Holmes: Do you see it, Watson?

Watson: What? I see nothing!

SD1: The match burns out as Holmes continues to beat at the bell rope.

SD2: A low whistle sounds, and Holmes stops.

SD3: Moments later, a scream pierces the silence.

Roylott: AAAAAAAAAAAH!

Watson: What can it mean?!

Holmes: It means it is all over.

SD1: Holmes lights a candle. He and Watson hurry to Dr. Roylott's room to find the doctor in his chair—dead.

SD2: A strange yellow band with brown speckles is wrapped around his head.

Helen (rushing in): The speckled band!

SD3: Just then, the band starts to move.

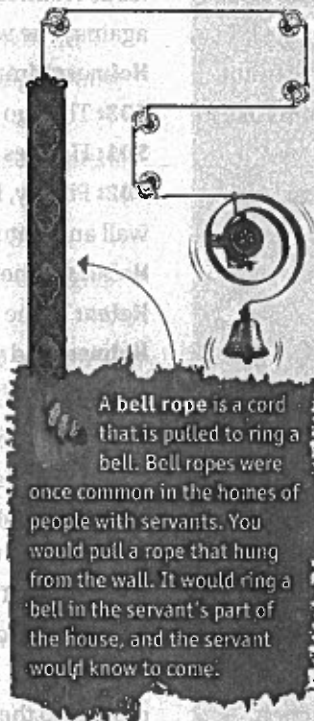
Watson: Is that . . . a . . . sss—

Helen: It's a snake!

Holmes: Yes, a swamp adder. Deadliest snake in India.

SD1: With the looped end of the whip, Holmes scoops up the snake and carries it to the safe. He shuts the door with a clang.

Helen: How did you know?



Holmes: We proved the danger had not come from outside, so it had to come from Roylott's room. Once I saw the ventilator and the bell rope, I knew the rope was there to provide a bridge between the hole in the wall and the bed.

Watson: You mean the rope was there for the snake to slither down, as it might slither down a branch?

Holmes: Exactly.

Watson: But how did you know Roylott had a snake?

Holmes: Knowing the doctor kept exotic animals, a snake was a logical guess. Its poison cannot be detected in an autopsy.

Helen: How did my stepfather do it?

Holmes: He stood on the chair and fed the snake through the ventilator. He used milk to train the snake to return at the

sound of the whistle. The clanging sound was the doctor shutting the snake in the safe.

Watson: How did he know the snake would kill Helen?

Holmes: He simply sent the snake in every night, knowing it would eventually find its victim. But this time, I was waiting. I attacked it with my cane.

Watson: Then it went back through the ventilator . . .

Holmes: I had aroused its temper, and it struck the first person it saw.

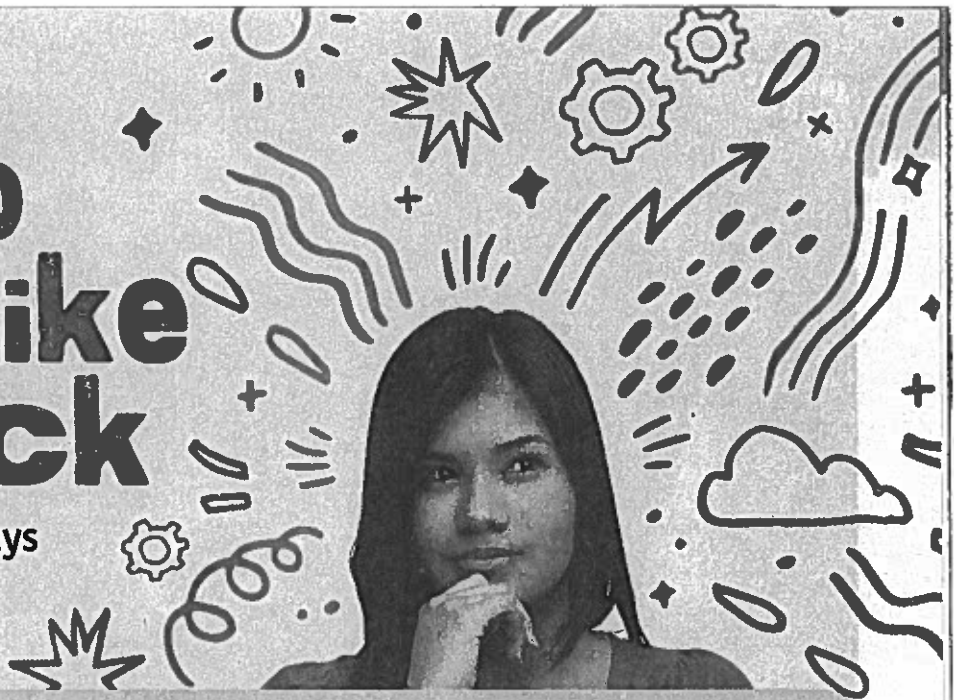
Helen: Mr. Holmes, you saved my life.

Holmes: There is a valuable lesson to be had here. Violence always recoils upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit that he digs for another. ●

HOW TO Think Like Sherlock

Five Sherlock-approved ways to sharpen your brain.

By Mackenzie Carro



1 Be observant.

Holmes could walk into a room and see things that others did not. How? He paid attention. He was fully present and engaged. This is called being mindful. A big part of being mindful, writes author Maria Konnikova in her book *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes*, is focusing on where you are and what you're doing. So the next time you're, say, walking home from school, take off your headphones, quiet your thoughts, and take in your surroundings. What do you see? Smell? Hear? You might be amazed by how much more you notice.



2 Keep an open mind.

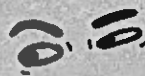
It's human nature to have **biases**, and these biases can get in your way. For



example, imagine that your family is moving from a big city to a small town. Perhaps you have a bias against small towns—you might **assume** they are boring. But if you keep an open mind about what your new life has to offer, you might be pleasantly surprised.

3 Be skeptical.

Holmes questioned everything—even things that others insisted were true. Most of us don't do this. Our first **instinct** is often to believe what other people tell us, writes Konnikova. But it's important to think for yourself about what you hear and read. So if your cousin sends you a random article that says milk is bad for you, don't run to your fridge and toss the milk in the trash. Consider the evidence the article gives. Is it enough? Is it reliable? Consult other sources before drawing your own conclusions.



4 Take breaks.

If you're stuck on something—whether it's a math problem or a dance move—take a break. Your mind needs time to process and reflect. Go for a walk, listen to music, or play a game. (Holmes liked to play the violin.) When you come back to your problem, you'll likely find that it's easier to tackle.



5 Talk it out.

According to Holmes, "Nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person." Saying something aloud helps you slow down and reflect. (Why do you think Holmes has Watson?) If you have to write an essay but don't know where to start, talk about it out loud to yourself or a friend. You'll clarify your thoughts—and you might even come up with a new idea.



Writing Contest

Choose one skill mentioned above. Explain how Holmes uses that skill to solve the case in the play you just read. Support your answer with text evidence. Send it to Sherlock Holmes Contest. Five winners will each get a copy of *The Murderer's Ape* by Jakob Wegelius.

Get this activity online.



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