

THE SPECKLED BAND

Vocabulary List

Below is a list of more complex words that can be found in the story. Use the definitions to explain to children what these words mean. For an extra activity, you can use these words in a spelling test.

dog-cart	a simple wooden cart pulled by one horse; used on country estates
embellishing	making something more interesting by adding extra details that are often untrue
frock-coat	a traditional style of coat with a fitted waist that flares out to just above the knee; worn by older, rather conservative gentlemen
high gaiters	material around the ankles or lower legs that protects trousers and legs from splashes of mud while horseriding
squandered	wasted (money or something valuable) in a bad or foolish way
vagabond	a person who wanders from place to place without a home or job

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Plot Sequencing Answer Sheet

These answers can be used to plan the next comic-strip storyboard activity.

1. Sherlock wakes Watson up when a lady arrives at 221B Baker Street with a new case.
2. The lady, Helen Stoner, explains how her late mother's inheritance was supposed to be divided between her, Doctor Roycott (her step-father) and Julia (her sister) once the girls marry.
3. Helen also explains that Julia died 2 years ago the night before her wedding. During a night terror in her bedroom, her last words were "It was the band. The speckled band!".
4. Helen is soon to be married and after spending a night in her sister's old bedroom at Stoke Moran, she too heard the same whistling her sister heard the night she died.
5. Sherlock and Watson visit the estate and upon inspecting the room, notice a dummy bell-pull attached to a ventilator.
6. Sherlock and Watson spend the night in the bedroom and hear a hissing at around 3am. Sherlock lights a match and sees something terrifying that Watson missed.
7. They enter the Doctor Roylott's room and find him dead with a 'speckled band' around his head.
8. The 'speckled band' is in fact a swamp adder; the deadliest snake in India. Sherlock concludes that the Doctor planned to kill his step-daughters before their wedding so he could keep their share of their mother's inheritance.

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Reading Comprehension Answer Sheet

Q1: Why had Watson not been able to share details on this case before now?

Answer: A pledge of secrecy to a young lady (Helen Stoner) prevented me from adding the case to the archive.

Q2: Turn to page 12. What gothic description does the writer use to describe Helen Stoner? What effect do these choice of words have on the reader?

Answer: "Her face was pale and her eyes restless with a frightened, haunted look to them."
This description evokes fear and creates a spooky atmosphere before Helen explains her case.

Q3: Sherlock analyses some clues on Helen Stoner's appearance. What does he conclude from these?

"her return ticket is tucked into her left glove"	Helen Stoner travelled by train.
"the left arm of her jacket is splattered with fresh mud"	She had a long journey along heavy roads to the station in a dog-cart
"she looked exhausted"	She started her journey early in the morning.

Q4: When would Julia and Helen Stoner receive their share of their mother's inheritance?

Answer: When they are married.

Q5: Why did Helen have difficulty retaining staff at their estate, Stoke Moran?

Answer: Her father's temper scared them away; no one would stay once they witnessed his behaviour.

Q6: Why does Helen think she is moving into her sister's old bedroom?

Answer: Some building work began on the west wing of the house so the outside wall of her own room was damaged.

Q7: What does Holmes find odd about the ventilator and bell-rope in Julia's old bedroom?	
Answer:	The ventilator leads to another bedroom (instead of outdoors) and the bell-rope is a dummy/isn't connected to a bell.
Q8: Turn to page 104. What example can you find that might suggest Watson is an unreliable narrator?	
Answer:	Watson couldn't see what came out of the ventilator, only Holmes could.
Q9: Sherlock lights a match to look up at the ventilator. What effect does the darkness have on the reader?	
Discussion:	Darkness is often used to convey negativity: evil, death or the unknown (whereas light is used to convey something positive: goodness, life or hope).
Q10: What did the 'speckled band' turn out to be?	
Answer:	A swamp adder; the deadliest snake in India.
Q11: Why does Holmes feel responsible for the Doctor's death?	
Answer:	Some of his strikes hit the snake and angered it, which is why it flew at the first person it saw (the Doctor).
Q12: Why do you think Sherlock and Watson agree to keep the true details of the case from the police?	
Answer:	Because they felt sympathy for Helen Stoner and the unhappiness her step-father has caused her.
Discussion:	Discuss the language Conan Doyle uses throughout the story to describe Helen in contrast to the Doctor and how it leads to this decision.
Q13: Why do you think the author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, chose to the title, The Speckled Band?	
Discussion:	The "speckled band" turns out to be a swamp adder; a deadly snake with a peculiar yellow band and brownish speckles. Conan Doyle leaves the reader unsuspecting and guessing throughout the story, but the clues all make sense in the end.
Q14: What does Holmes find that explains the timing of the Doctor's crimes against his step-daughters?	
Answer:	Mrs Stoner's/his late wife's will
Q15: What does Helen reveal earlier in the story that explains the Doctor's greed for money and wealth?	
Answer:	The family fortunes have long gone and all that is left is a crumbling house, a few acres of ground and a mortgage to pay. Generations of the family squandered their money and my step-father realised that he would need to establish himself in some profession.
Q16: Sometimes Holmes and Watson take justice into their own hands. Do you agree with their choice to keep the true details from the police in The Speckled Band? Explain your answer.	
Discussion:	Pupils are encouraged to think about word choices and characterisation and how they evoke sympathy with the reader. How the words make them feel will determine their individual answer - there is no right or wrong answer here.

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Diary Entry Activity

The Sherlock Holes stories are narrated by Dr. Watson. In this activity, pupils are encouraged to think about Sherlock's thoughts and feelings in their writing.

Choose a scene in *The Speckled Band* from the list below and ask your class to write it from Sherlock's point of view.

- Sherlock deciding to wake Watson up when Helen Stoner arrives
- Sherlock and Watson arriving at Stoke Moran
- Sherlock seeing the swamp adder (snake) for the first time
- Sherlock realising he is responsible for the snake lashing out on the Doctor.

The following checklist can be used as guidance or assessment for this activity:

- Written in first person
- Recalls the events of the story/scene
- Includes personal feelings/emotions
- Adopts the tone of the character