

THE SIGN OF THE FOUR

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.

blowpipe	a long tube-like weapon used to blow a dart (or other weapon)
downstream	moving in the direction in which a stream or river flows
hawk-like	features (eyes and nose) that makes someone's appearance resemble a hawk
mudbank	mud on the bed of a river or at the bottom of the sea
pawnbroker	a person who lends money in exchange for a valuable item
Raja	an Indian king or prince
seafaring	regularly travelling by sea
upriver	moving towards the source of a river

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Plot Sequencing Answer Sheet

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

1. Jonathan Small joins the army and soon a crocodile bites half of his leg off.
2. Jonathan Small swears to help Mohamet Singh and Abdullah Khan steal a raja's treasures.
3. The four are arrested and imprisoned for life.
4. Jonathan Small offers Major Sholto and Captain Morstan a share of the treasure in exchange for his freedom.
5. Major Sholto turns on Captain Morstan and Jonathan Small and takes all of the treasure back to England.
6. Jonathan Small goes back to England with Tonga, where a weak-hearted Major Sholto dies at the shock of seeing him.
7. Tonga climbs into the attic in Pondicherry Lodge and retrieves the hidden treasure.
8. Knowing that he will soon be imprisoned, Jonathan Small dumps pieces of the treasure along the River Thames so that nobody can have it.

THE
SHERLOCK HOLMES
 CHILDREN'S COLLECTION



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Reading Comprehension Answer Sheet

Q1: What 4 clues does Sherlock find on the watch that helps him deduce it belongs to Watson's brother?	
Answer:	1. initials/H.W. 2. marks all over the watch 3. pawnbroker's ticket number 4. scratches where a key has slipped
Q2: What brings Miss. Morstan to visit Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson?	
Answer:	She wants them to investigate her father's disappearance.
Discussion:	<i>While Mr. Morstan was away in the army ten years ago, he went out at night and never returned. Four years later, Miss. Morstan saw a newspaper advert telling her to come forward for her own advantage. She did, and each year she received a single pearl. She recently received a letter from a stranger asking her to meet them tonight along with two friends. She wants Sherlock and Dr. Watson to accompany her.</i>
Q3: Which characters are in 'the four'?	
Answer:	Jonathan Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan and Dost Akbar
Q4: Explain how the treasure was taken from India to England.	
Answer:	Jonathan Small offers a share of the treasure to Major Sholto and Captain Morstan in exchange for his freedom. Sholto turns on them and takes all the treasure for himself back to England.
Discussion:	<i>In Jonathan Small's account, 'the four' are arrested for the murder of Ahmet and are sentenced to life in prison. When Small is moved from India to the Andaman Islands, he negotiates his freedom with two gambling officers using the location of the treasure. Sholto turns on them both and takes the entire loot back to England for himself.</i>
Q5: Why is Dr. Watson happy that Miss. Morstan doesn't inherit any of the treasure?	
Answer:	Because if she was rich then she would be out of his reach.
Discussion:	<i>Throughout the story, Watson is concerned that if Mary inherits the treasure she will become upper class and therefore out of his league. Watson is relieved when the treasure is lost and asks Miss. Morstan to marry him.</i>



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Reading Comprehension Answer Sheet - Advanced

Q1: Turn to page 71. Find examples from the text that fit the following literary devices, and describe each effect has on this part of this story.			
Answer:	onomatopoeia	roared; whizzed; clanked	adds excitement to an action; provokes interest by allowing the reader to hear the sound being described
	personification	throb; quivered; threw; showed	connects the reader with an object and helps them to understand, sympathize with, or react emotionally to non-human characters
	simile	like a living thing	creates images for the reader to compare what is being described
	metaphor	cut through the still water; sent two waves rolling to left and right	creates images that are easier to understand and respond to than literal language
Q2: Turn to page 250-252. Why does Holmes not congratulate Dr. Watson on his engagement?			
Answer:	Holmes tells Watson he will “never marry, in case I lose my judgement”. He doesn’t believe in love or marriage as it will affect his ability to see things clearly, and therefore affect his detective skills.		
Q3. Turn to page 183-184. What effect does Watson’s descriptions of Jonathan Small have on the reader?			
Answer:	“his black, curly hair was streaked with grey”	old, worn out; evokes sympathy	
	“there was more sorrow than anger in his expression”	regretful; aware of his fate	
	“he looked with his sharp eyes at the box”	forboding; he knows the box is empty but the others do not	

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Q4: What effect does the headline have on readers of The Evening Standard?

Answer: The choice of words, 'mysterious business' leaves the reader in suspense and urges them to read on. In context, Victorian Britain had an obsession with graphic descriptions of death and murder.

Discussion: *Victorian Britain had an obsession and morbid fascination with death - the language used by newspaper journalists satisfied them.*

Q5: Who was arrested for the murder along with members of the household?

Answer: Thaddeus Sholto

Q6: How did the thieves enter the house?

Answer: They made their way across the roof and through a trapdoor that led into an attic room.

Q7: Re-write the first column of the article using literary techniques to evoke more emotions from the reader.

Discussion: *Pupils are encouraged to build on their knowledge of literary devices from Q1 and their effects discussed in Q3. Areas to develop with more description are:*

- 'was found dead in his room'
- 'a valuable collection of Indian gems was missing'

As the word count in the newspaper article is short, pupils must make a creative choice of words and write concise, effective descriptions that would appeal to a Victorian audience.

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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 Sign of the Four* from the list below and ask your class to write it from Sherlock's point of view.

- Watson testing Sherlock's skills with his brother's watch
- Miss. Mary Morstan arriving with a case
- The wild chase down the Thames
- Watson telling Sherlock about his engagement to Mary

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