between the lines

A lesson written for every student in the room

FREE LESSON SAMPLER

The Sign of Four: The seven-percent solution

How does Conan Doyle present Holmes in the opening of the novel?

Lesson 3 of 34 from the scheme of learning

Teacher notes, slides and student pages at all three levels

Written for the AQA specification



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What is in this sampler

This is one complete lesson from our The Sign of Four scheme for Literature Paper 1, Section B. It comes exactly as it appears in the full scheme, so you can teach it next week and see how our lessons work.

Teacher notes	Timings with slide numbers, Do Now answers, the exploded quotation, the hinge question and what each answer tells you, the task at three levels, a model paragraph and notes on misconceptions and adapting the lesson (next pages).
Slides	The editable PowerPoint deck for Lesson 3, with teacher notes on every slide (separate file).
Student pages	The lesson's pages from the student booklet: one question, with the Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support side by side (at the end of this document).

How every lesson works

Know	Do Now from memory, vocabulary, then the reading. The five Do Now questions build on what students learned in Lessons 1 and 2 of the full scheme.
Apply	Explode one quotation together; a hinge question checks understanding.
Master	One shared question answered as a What–How–Why paragraph, with Securing, Strengthening and Soaring support; then a model paragraph and an exit ticket.

Three levels of support

Every student answers the same question in every lesson. What changes is the support on the page, so the whole class does the same lesson:

Securing	The most support: a word bank, a choice of quotations, a worked example and sentence starters. For students working towards a grade 4.
Strengthening	Prompts for What, How and Why, a paragraph planner and a checklist. For students working at grades 5 and 6.
Soaring	A debatable statement, prompts to think further and an argument planner. For students aiming at grades 7 to 9.

The names describe the support, never the student. The hinge question shows who might start where, and students move between levels from lesson to lesson.

In the full scheme

- 34 lessons like this one, with editable slides and a teacher handbook (lesson notes, unit map, assessment guide and knowledge bank)
- A student booklet with every lesson and all three levels of support, plus the same lessons as one pack per level
- Six weeks of independent practice homework at three levels
- Four Feedback Loop progress checks with whole-class feedback sheets and improvement tasks

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- An exam-style end-of-unit essay with a teacher guide, level guidance and annotated model answers
- A Soaring stretch booklet for students aiming at the top levels
- A catch-up sheet for every lesson, for students who missed it
- An inclusion guide: pre-teaching, SEND, EAL and pupil premium notes for every lesson
- The revision workbook and the model answer pack, to print for every student
- Every licence for the scheme also includes its 30 Raising Achievement drills for intervention sessions

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Lesson 3: The seven-percent solution

SEQUENCE 1: CONTEXT AND CHAPTERS 1 AND 2 · 60 MINUTES

How does Conan Doyle present Holmes in the opening of the novel?

By the end of the lesson, students can

- Explain how the opening paragraphs show Holmes's cocaine habit and Watson's reaction to it
- Analyse the list of adjectives in "his long, white, nervous fingers"
- Write a What–How–Why paragraph on how Conan Doyle presents Holmes in the opening

Lesson at a glance

Time	Phase	What happens	Slides
0–8	Know	Do Now: five quick questions on Lesson 1 and the context of the novel. Students self-mark from the answer slide.	2–3
8–20	Know	Before reading, say plainly that the extract shows Holmes injecting cocaine and that Watson, a doctor, objects. Pre-teach "nonchalant", "masterly", "diffident" and "protest". Read the extract aloud while students follow and underline every word that shows Holmes's skill and every word that shows Watson's unease.	4–6
20–30	Apply	Explode the quotation together. Think aloud about why Watson describes a pair of hands before he describes the man, then students annotate their copy. Before you reveal any notes, students try the four empty boxes on the first explode slide, on their own or after you model one box.	7–8
30–35	Apply	Hinge question on mini-whiteboards. Use the answers to decide who starts on which level of support.	9–10
35–53	Master	Students write a What–How–Why paragraph in answer to the question, using their level of support in the student booklet. Share the model paragraph in the last five minutes.	11–12
53–60	Master	Exit ticket. Collect and sort into three piles to plan the start of the next lesson.	13

Do Now answers

1	At which university did Conan Doyle study medicine?	**The University of Edinburgh**
2	Which of Conan Doyle's teachers was a model for Holmes?	**Joseph Bell, who could tell a great deal about a patient from close observation**
3	What does Holmes call himself in the line we exploded in Lesson 1?	**"The only unofficial consulting detective"**
4	When did the Metropolitan Police set up its Criminal Investigation Department, and where was its headquarters?	**In 1878, at Scotland Yard**
5	Who tells the story of The Sign of Four?	**Dr. Watson, Holmes's friend, who is a doctor**

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Vocabulary

nonchalant	calm and relaxed, as if nothing could worry you
masterly	showing great skill
diffident	shy and unwilling to speak up
protest	to say firmly that you disagree

Reading

Chapter 1: the syringe

Watson watches his friend Sherlock Holmes at the start of the novel. Holmes is injecting cocaine, which was legal in Britain in 1890. Watson is a doctor, and he disapproves.

> Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantelpiece and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. Finally he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined armchair with a long sigh of satisfaction.
>
> Three times a day for many months I had witnessed this performance, but custom had not reconciled my mind to it. On the contrary, from day to day I had become more irritable at the sight, and my conscience swelled nightly within me at the thought that I had lacked the courage to protest. Again and again I had registered a vow that I should deliver my soul upon the subject, but there was that in the cool, nonchalant air of my companion which made him the last man with whom one would care to take anything approaching to a liberty. His great powers, his masterly manner, and the experience which I had had of his many extraordinary qualities, all made me diffident and backward in crossing him.

Arthur Conan Doyle, The Sign of Four (1890), Chapter 1

Word help **morocco**: a fine, soft goat leather · **sinewy**: thin and strong, with tight muscles · **reconciled**: made to accept something · **nonchalant**: calm and relaxed, as if nothing could worry you

Explode the quotation

Method
A list of three adjectives. Watson describes Holmes by his hands, in the middle of an injection.

Zoom in
The adjective “nervous” suggests a body that is restless and tightly strung. “White” suggests hands that rarely see the sun.

“his long, white, nervous fingers”

Effect
Readers first see the great detective as a drug user at work. We admire him and feel uneasy at once.

Context
Cocaine was legal in Britain in 1890 and was used in medicine. Watson is a doctor, so he can say what it does to the body.

Hinge question

Watson describes Holmes’s “long, white, nervous fingers”. What effect does the list of adjectives have?

A. It gives an uneasy first picture of Holmes: his hands look pale, delicate and restless. **(the right answer)**

B. It shows that Holmes is strong and healthy, so we can trust him at once.

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C. It shows that Holmes is old and has lost his skill.

What the answers tell you

B has read "long" and "white" as good signs: ask what the hands are doing in the sentence, and what "nervous" adds. C has guessed from "nervous": nothing in the extract says that he is old, and Watson writes of "His great powers". These may be your students who start on Securing.

Why the answer is right

The adjectives make Holmes's hands look pale, delicate and restless, and they are busy with a syringe, so the first picture of him is uneasy.

Master task

How does Conan Doyle present Holmes in the opening of the novel?

Securing aiming for a 4

Quotations to choose from

"his long, white, nervous fingers"

"the cool, nonchalant air of my companion"

"His great powers, his masterly manner"

Starters

Conan Doyle presents Holmes as a man who ____. Watson describes ____, using the ____ "____". This makes the reader feel ____, because Watson is a ____ and cocaine was ____ in 1890.

Strengthening aiming for grades 5 to 6

Prompts

What: Answer the question in one sentence: is Holmes shown as admirable, troubling or both?

How: Choose one short quotation from the extract. Name the method, and zoom in on one word, naming its word class.

Why: Say what the reader feels about Holmes and about Watson, and use the context of cocaine in 1890 to explain Conan Doyle's purpose.

Soaring aiming for grades 7 to 9

The debate

"Conan Doyle makes us admire Holmes and fear for him at the same moment, and Watson is the reason."

Argue with the statement. Decide how far Watson's narration controls what we think of Holmes in the opening, and where Holmes slips out of his control.

Model paragraph

What	Conan Doyle presents Holmes as a brilliant man who is also a danger to himself, and he shows this before Holmes says a word.
How	The novel opens on a syringe, and Watson describes Holmes's "long, white, nervous fingers" at work. The list of three adjectives makes the hands pale, delicate and restless, and the adjective "nervous" suggests a body that never settles. Watson then speaks of Holmes's "great powers" and "masterly manner", yet the same paragraph shows him sinking back "with a long sigh of satisfaction".
Why	Readers admire Holmes and fear for him together. Watson is a doctor and cocaine was legal in 1890, so he can only protest in his conscience. Conan Doyle gives the great detective a weakness at once, and makes Watson the character we trust to tell us about it.

Exit ticket

Conan Doyle presents Holmes in the opening as…

Teacher notes

Subject knowledge

The novel opens on the syringe: "his hypodermic syringe" is in the first sentence, and Holmes's habit returns in the last line, "there still remains the cocaine-bottle". The adjectives in "his long, white, nervous

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