



Year 9 English – Sign of Four

Key Knowledge

Key Terminology

Characters/Symbols

1. The character Sherlock Holmes is methodical, dogmatic and detached.
2. The character Dr Watson is principled, dependable and compassionate.
3. The character Mary Morstan is passive, virtuous and a Victorian stereotype.
4. The character Thaddeus Sholto is nervous, self-obsessed and eccentric.
5. The character Bartholomew Sholto is
6. The character Jonathan Small is calculating, ruthless and principled.
7. The character Athelney Jones is pompous, comical and foolish.
8. The character Tonga is savage, animalistic and representative of deep racial prejudice.
9. The Baker Street Irregulars are dishonest, unkempt and a nuisance.
10. Mr Sherman (Toby's dog owner) is suspicious, aggressive and uneducated.
11. Mrs Smith is lower class and inferior.
12. Jack (Mrs Smith's son) is naughty, impolite and cheeky.

Themes

Crime and Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The story revolves around a number of crimes. Doyle looks at the difference between the punishment of the law (as Small faces) and the punishment or judgement of a greater source.• Small feels he deserves what he receives but was desperate for Sholto to pay for his crime of deception.• Thaddeus Sholto worries about justice as well. He cares that Mary receive her rightful portion of the treasure.• By the end of the novel the crimes are solved, but the treasure is lost forever, perhaps representing a form of justice.
Wealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The theft of the treasure and the distribution of this wealth is the main driver for the crime story of the novel.• Wealth is seen as a 'golden barrier' to love in the relationship between Watson and Mary; this reflects the rigid class structure in Victorian Britain.• The Agra treasure connects the crime to events in the British Empire and Victorian attitudes to colonisation.• Major Sholto is shown to be greedy for wealth, and acts disloyally as a result of this.• Jonathan Small's attitude to wealth relates to the theme of justice: he does not want to see others profit from the treasure when the Four risked everything to obtain it.
Foreignness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The concept of that which is different is dealt with here. Thaddeus Sholto's home is an unusual combination of domestic and other-worldly, while Mrs Forrester's home is a 'tranquil English home'.• The character of Tonga showcases the 'other', the unusual elements of world culture that are very different from the English ideal of the Victorian era.

Context

- **Setting** - Victorian London. London was a dirty, busy, overpopulated city that was growing quicker than it could cope with. Many people were desperately poor, some were very rich.
- **The British Empire** – Britain had been colonising land for a long time, but by the C19th imperialism was at its height and the British Empire was a superpower. British people felt a moral responsibility in the world but went on to exploit many countries for financial gain.
- **The Indian Rebellion (mutiny)** - Many native Indian soldiers rebelled against the British in 1857. The British newspapers exaggerated the horror of it, leading to fear of savagery. Tonga is presented as savage.
- **Race** – Britain had colonised many lands but were still afraid of rebellion. Forcing British values, language and religion on native peoples was commonplace and Britain needed to show these people as inferior savages to justify their violence.
- **The Role of Women** – Women were viewed as the inferior gender, reliant on their fathers and then their husbands and only able to inherit if there was no male heir.
- **Class** – Class divides were strong and clear, particularly in London during the Victorian period.

Key Vocabulary

Automaton	Acting in a machine like way.
Acumen	To make quick, apt decisions
Avarice	Extreme greed
Decorum	Good taste and decent behaviour
Charlatanism	Being a fraud/dishonest
Egocentric	Being absorbed in oneself
Enigmatic	Mysterious
Fastidious	Careful attention to detail
Inimitable	Unable to match
Nonchalant	Looking calm/relaxed
Ruminate	Reflect deeply on something

Conventions of a Detective Story

Victorian Detective Novel - Stories of crimes being solved through analytical deduction.

- a rational and intelligent detective who is highly memorable.
- a companion for the detective (usually less intelligent than the detective)
- an outstanding opponent or a criminal clever enough to be a match for the hero.
- a mystery – sometimes involving murder.
- clues to the solution which the reader can enjoy as a puzzle.
- a red herring (a misleading or false clue) although not absolutely essential!
- build-up of tension.
- a satisfactory resolution in which the mystery is solved. The solution must seem obvious, logical, possible.