The Mystery of the Stolen Jewel
A delightful adaptation of a Sherlock Holmes mystery

Preview: Bring your students into the fascinating world of Sherlock Holmes as he works to solve a bizarre mystery. Plus! An informational text about a jewel heist solved using modern-day forensic science.

Learning Objectives: to compare crime-solving techniques past and present; to form an opinion about a fictional character

Key Skills: character, inference, author’s craft, plot, synthesizing

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan
Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read
Preview vocabulary and text features.
(10 minutes, activity sheet online)
• Distribute or project our Vocabulary Definitions for students to refer to as they read. Highlighted words: accomplice, culprit, enlighten, exquisite, molecule, ruffians, timid
• Look at the photographs in the play. Ask volunteers to read the captions. How do these text features help the reader understand the setting of the play?

2 Reading the Play
(30 minutes)
• Read aloud the “As You Read” box on page 20.
• Assign parts and read the play.
• Discuss the following questions as a class:

   Close-Reading Questions
   (6 minutes, activity sheet online)

   From Scene 1, what can you conclude about Sherlock Holmes’s personality? (character) His living room is filled with books, so he is likely a curious and thoughtful man. He is intelligent and observant, as shown by how much he can infer from a hat. You can conclude that Holmes is a well-respected investigator from the fact that a police officer is asking him for help.

   At the end of Scene 4, Holmes says of Baker, “He clearly knows nothing of the carbuncle.” How does Holmes conclude this? (inference) When Holmes offers Baker a replacement goose, Baker is thankful and calls Holmes “a good man.” He does not seem concerned that his original goose is gone. If he had known about the carbuncle, he would have been very upset.

   In Scene 5, why does Holmes have Ryder followed? (inference) Ryder is looking for a goose identical to the one in which the jewel was found. Also, Ryder wrings his hands, indicating that he is anxious about something.

   In Scene 7, SD1 says, “Ryder and Cusack scurry out the door.” What does the word scurry tell you
about how they leave the room? What if the author had used walk instead? (author’s craft) Scurry shows that Ryder and Cusack are eager to leave before Holmes changes his mind about having them arrested. The use of walk would have made them seem calmer.

What is the purpose of the flashbacks in Scenes 3 and 6? (author’s craft) Scene 3 provides information about the theft discussed in Scene 2. The flashback in Scene 6 shows that Ryder is deeply upset about something he has done.

Why was John Horner, the plumber, blamed for the crime? (plot, synthesizing) It was common in late 19th-century London for the police to round up known criminals and get them to confess. Horner had a criminal record, so Cusack and Ryder knew it would be easy to frame him as the thief.

• Break students into groups to discuss the following.

Critical-Thinking Question
(3 minutes, activity sheet online)
Holmes says that by letting Ryder and Cusack go, he may have “saved their souls.” What do you think he means? Do you agree with him? Holmes’s next remark, “Send them to jail now and make them jailbirds for life, I daresay,” helps illuminate what he means: Holmes may be suggesting that if Ryder and Cusack go to jail, the experience will turn them into hardened criminals—or maybe just that they, like John Horner, will be looked upon with suspicion from then on. When Holmes says he may have saved their souls, he may mean that by giving them a second chance, he is encouraging them to change their behavior—because people have a tendency to meet the expectations put on them.

Discuss the following questions as a class, which draw on both the article and the play.

Close-Reading Questions
(3 minutes, activity sheet online)
Melanie Abrahams states that DNA evidence is “perhaps the biggest breakthrough” in the recent history of forensic science.
What facts in the article support her statement? DNA is as unique as a fingerprint. It can be found in fingerprints, strands of hair, saliva, and sweat left behind at crime scenes. DNA has been used to solve crimes that might not have been solved otherwise.

How do Sherlock Holmes’s methods compare with the methods used in the Diamonds R Forever case? Both Holmes and the police in the Diamonds R Forever case carefully examined the details of the crime they were investigating. Holmes advertised for the owner of the goose, asked him where it came from, went to the source, saw a frazzled-looking man and had him followed, etc. The police in the Diamonds R Forever case sifted through the trash and realized that a plastic spoon, which might have seemed unrelated, was important. The cases are different in that the police in the Diamonds R Forever case had access to technology, such as DNA testing, that Holmes did not.

Skill Focus:
Forming an Opinion
Hand out our activity sheet Forming an Opinion to help students prepare to respond to the writing prompt on page 24.

Connecting the Article and the Play
• Read “How Fast Food Helped Catch a Jewel Thief” as a class.

EXTENSION: HOLD A CLASS TRIAL
Imagine that James Ryder and Catherine Cusack are arrested for stealing the blue carbuncle. Hold their trial in your classroom—with students acting as the judge, attorneys, witnesses, jury, etc. (Witnesses can be characters in the play.)
Differentiation

For Struggling Readers
In a well-organized paragraph, explain the steps that Holmes took to solve the mystery of the stolen carbuncle.

For Advanced Readers
When you make a “deduction,” you come to a conclusion using logic and reason. Explain how deduction helped solve the case of the missing carbuncle in the play and the Diamonds R Forever heist in the article.

Complexity Factors
See how these texts will challenge your students.

Purpose: Based on a classic Sherlock Holmes story, this play follows the famous detective as he works to solve a mystery. The accompanying informational text explores modern crime-solving techniques.

Structure: The play is mainly chronological but includes two flashbacks. The article includes cause-and-effect structures.

Language Convenationality and Clarity:
• Vocabulary: many challenging academic and domain-specific words (e.g., ruffians, culprit, molecule). The play also contains regional and archaic dialect (e.g., “By Jove!” and “We can’t figure why anyone’d be sad o’er a goose.”)
• Figurative Language: rhetorical questions, metaphors

Knowledge Demands: Some familiarity with the 19th-century London setting of the play will be helpful. The article refers to an assistant district attorney and a national criminal database.

Lexile: 1070L ("How Fast Food Helped Catch a Jewel Thief")

Literature Connections
Other great mysteries with famous detectives:
• Chasing Vermeer by Blue Balliett
• “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” by Edgar Allan Poe
• The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin