

*The
Sign of Four*



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Introduction

This GCSE pack is designed as a route through the text, with teaching ideas and accompanying resources. The pack is based on the core assessment objectives for AQA GCSE English Literature (2015) and contains all of the resources you need for teaching this unit of work.

Specific resources and exam practice questions are included within the pack. The activities and ideas will help students to develop a close understanding of the text, explore its social, cultural and historical contexts, consider Conan Doyle's ideas and perspectives, and analyse his use of language and structure. There are also suggested revision activities to enable students to revisit the text for the exam.

The pack has a total of 24 lessons and 81 resources with a selection of starter, main and plenary activities to choose from, as well as further discussion questions, extension tasks and homework opportunities.

The overall structure of the pack could lend itself to a first reading of the text – in other words, students can read Chapter 1 and work on the early activities without needing to know the rest of the text. It would be beneficial if higher attaining students could read the whole text in advance as they'll be able to explore connections between characters, themes and events, think about the significance of the text's structure from the start and allow them to consider parallels and contrasts across different parts of the story.

A note on editions

We've used the Penguin Classics 2001 edition of *The Sign of Four* and where page numbers are included, they refer to this version.

If you have any questions about the pack, please get in touch: email support@teachit.co.uk or call us on 01225 788850. Alternatively, you might like to give some feedback for other Teachit English members – you can do this by adding a comment on the *The Sign of Four* teaching pack page on Teachit English.

AQA specification summary

AQA GCSE English Literature

Specification: English Literature (exams in 2017) (8702)

Example papers and mark schemes: English Literature (exams in 2017) (8702)

Paper 1: *Shakespeare and the 19th-century novel*

Section B: *The 19th-century novel* (20% of GCSE mark)

- External examination
- Whole examination: 1 hour 45 minutes
- 50% of time should be devoted to responding to each question, therefore there are approximately 50 minutes for *The Sign of Four*.
- Students will answer one question. They will be required to write in detail about an extract from the text and then write about the text as a whole.
- Students are **not** permitted to take copies of the text into the exam.

AO1	<p>Read, understand and respond to texts.</p> <p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response • use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
AO2	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

<p>AO1: Response to task and text</p> <p>What is Conan Doyle writing about in this chapter or the text as a whole?</p> <p>What do I think or feel about ...?</p> <p>What are the best quotations or references that I can use to discuss my opinions of these aspects?</p>	<p>Students might consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the plot and the events that occur • characters and relationships between them – what do they say, what do they do? • themes and key ideas.
<p>AO2: Writer's methods and effects</p> <p>How has Conan Doyle presented his ideas?</p> <p>Which specific words and phrases can be used to describe these methods?</p> <p>What effects do the writer's methods have – what would the reader feel, imagine, think, learn or want to do?</p>	<p>Students might consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the use of language and linguistic techniques • structural features • the order of events • the juxtaposition of events • parallels across the text • the use of characterisation: characters as conscious constructs, contrasts or foils • how characters develop and change over the text.
<p>AO3: Context, ideas and perspectives</p> <p>Why has Conan Doyle written it?</p> <p>How does the text reflect the times he lived in?</p>	<p>Students might consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what ideas he is exploring about people, human nature or society itself • what issues are being highlighted or explored • whether we can infer a message, lesson or viewpoint that Conan Doyle may be expressing through the chapter or the text as a whole • whether there is a specific goal that Conan Doyle may be trying to achieve through a particular chapter or the text as a whole.

Pre-reading: context and themes

Text context: paired presentations

Organise students into pairs and hand them a context information sheet with an accompanying research/presentation task. Topics for research include:

- Victorian London
- drugs in Victorian Britain
- crime, detection and policing in Victorian Britain
- the British Empire, imperialism and colonialism
- gender in Victorian Britain
- Who was Conan Doyle and why did he write *The Sign of Four*? (AO3)

See Resource 1.

Then and now reflection

Students could complete a 'Then and now' Venn diagram (Resource 2) by summarising their learning about the Victorian context and explaining how the world is different today. In the middle they could identify any aspects that remain unchanged or the same. They could also complete a section explaining the attitudes a modern reader would have in comparison to the attitudes they might have seen displayed at the time. (AO3)

Genre expectations

Brainstorm the characteristic features you would expect to see used in a crime/detective story. Then provide students with the features of detective genres and ask them to develop their brainstorm in detail by adding any ideas they had not thought of. (AO3)

Thinking about themes

Students could create a word map for each of the key themes in the text (that they can continue to add to as they read the text). The word map could include: a definition of the word, synonyms, collocates, antonyms and illustrations that symbolise the meanings of each key word. (AO2)

See Resource 3.

Chapter 1: The Science of Deduction

Lesson 1 – Holmes and Watson: first impressions

Starter activities

Chapter title analysis

Just looking at the title, ask students to discuss what they think might happen in this chapter. (AO2)

Key themes

Ask students to read the definitions of the terms 'rational' and 'emotional' then use Resource 4 to complete a personality quiz. (AO2)

Rational	<i>based on or in accordance with reason or logic</i>
Emotional	<i>arousing or characterised by intense feeling</i>

Attitudes to addiction

Provide the students with a list of facts about the Victorians' use of drugs and ask them to consider which they think are true and which they think are false (see Resource 5). Give them the correct answers and use these to compare Victorian attitudes with modern attitudes. (AO3)

Answers:				
1. True	2. False	3. True	4. True	5. True
6. False	7. False	8. True	9. True	10. True

Introduction activities

What is characterisation?

Introduce the term 'characterisation' and get students to brainstorm what the term means and ways in which a writer can create and show character. You could display a well-known character on the board, e.g. Harry Potter, and label the ways his character is shown in the text. For example, how he talks, what he says, the clothes he wears, etc. (AO2)

First impressions of Holmes and Watson

Students could summarise their first impressions of the characters of Holmes and Watson. They could use words from the selection below to describe the characters and discuss why they have chosen these words. (AO2)

cold	egotistical	quiet	rational	kind
intelligent	rude	logical	thoughtful	irritated
worried	bored	proud	awkward	confident
emotional	reserved	provocative	calm	restless
irresponsible	respectable	dignified	insensitive	responsible
innovative	arrogant	modest	emotional	romantic

Development activities

Watson and Holmes: language

Ask students to explore the importance of the opening and the ending of this first chapter with Resource 6. (AO2)

Characters and relationships

Use Resource 7 to look for evidence of Holmes as symbolising the concept of rationality and Watson as symbolising the idea of emotion. (AO1)

Plenary activities

Succinct character summaries

Students identify five key words that they feel best describe Holmes and Watson's characters as presented at the beginning of the novel. (AO1)

Cloze activity

Get students to design a cloze exercise for a partner to fill in leaving gaps to describe the main points about the plot of this chapter or one of the key characters in this chapter. (AO1)

Extension opportunities

The ideal detective

Ask students to identify comments made by Holmes which reveal the writer's view of the ideal detective. Get students to explain Conan Doyle's vision for policing and detection in the future. (AO3)

Presentation of Holmes

Get students to explore how Holmes is presented at the beginning and the end of the chapter: how does his character develop and how do we respond? Provide some starting points:

- At the beginning Holmes is presented as melancholy.
- Holmes 'raised his eyes languidly'.
- Holmes says, 'My mind rebels at stagnation.'
- Conan Doyle's use of imperatives and short sentences.
- At the end Holmes is presented as purposeful and focused. (AO1, AO2)

Further discussion questions

1. *The Sign of Four* is a story that was originally written to be serialised in instalments in editions of magazines. This meant that Conan Doyle had to use plot, language and structural features to hook the reader quickly and to ensure that they finished the chapter wanting to read the next instalment. What features did Conan Doyle include in the chapter in order to achieve these goals? (AO3)
2. A number of famous Victorian people experimented with drugs, including well-known artists and writers, because they believed it would enhance their creative abilities and skills. Can you connect this to why Conan Doyle chose to have Holmes's character use drugs? How might this influence our view of him as a character? (AO3)
3. Reflect on the reasons that Conan Doyle may have chosen to begin the chapter by showing Holmes as using drugs and Watson as disapproving. How might Watson's character symbolise Conan Doyle's own views on the use of drugs and the potential dangers of them? (Remember that Conan Doyle had a medical background himself.) (AO3)

Preparing for assessment/homework

Chapter summaries

Students could complete a chapter summary for Chapter 1 in which they summarise all of the key information they need to remember using the template provided (see Resource 8). (AO1, AO2, AO3)

Vocabulary development

Students could add to their word map for some of the more sophisticated language they have come across in reading Chapter 1. See Resource 3 for a template. (AO2)