

A Study in Scarlet by Arthur Conan Doyle
Discussion Questions

1. What is the character of Watson like? Find specific parts of the text that provide information about Watson. Why do you think Doyle included him?
2. What is the character of Holmes like? Find specific parts of the text that provide information about Holmes and his particular interests, and what they might suggest about his character (i.e., his violin playing).
3. What events/circumstances/personal characteristics contribute to the “easy” relationship that quickly develops between Watson and Holmes, especially since, as we quickly learn, Holmes does not get along with many people.
4. How does Holmes get involved in this murder case? Since he often shows no interest in cases presented to him, why does this particular case appeal to him?
5. Why does Watson get involved in this murder case?
6. What is the relationship between Holmes and Scotland Yard? In what ways does Holmes need Scotland Yard? Explain what need might mean in reference to this relationship.
7. Why do you think Doyle wrote this so that we see Holmes only as reported through Watson’s eyes? What effect does that have on readers’ view of Holmes? How would this story differ if it were Holmes writing? What if it were told by an anonymous third-person narrator?
8. When introducing Sherlock Holmes, what does this novel establish about his methods of detection? Do you think his approach to detection reasonable?
9. What do you think about his ideas regarding knowledge? Do you agree it is not necessary to know the earth revolves around the sun?
10. Consider the various ways that social and intellectual tensions in 19th-century London are part of the story of this novel. What are some of those tensions?
11. In some ways, Holmes is a difficult character to like, especially because of his contempt for others in the story and for us. In your opinion, what makes Sherlock Holmes such an important and enduring figure in British fiction? Why do readers like him?
12. In what ways does Holmes represent what we might call a stereotypical Britisher?