

The Mulahabad Diamonds – A Sherlock Holmes Mystery

Aims: To practise skills of deduction using three reading texts
To practise speaking skills by discussing and solving the case

Length of lesson: 1.5 hrs approx

Level/age: Adults – C1

Language: key words - *boarding school (n), army regiment (n), revolver (n), pillow (n), burglar (n), lid (n), sinister (adj), butler (n), garden shed (n), axe (n), wrist (n), tourniquet (n), pass away (vb), mutter (vb), wound (n/vb), mob (n), hold as evidence (vb), admit (vb), court martial (n)*

Materials: 3 reading texts, 1 reading text with solution, prompt questions for teacher to read out

Preparation: Photocopy the three reading texts, one for each learner.
One copy of prompts for Teacher.
Photocopy final text with the solution

Procedure:

Warmer: Learners in pairs tell partners what they know about Sherlock Holmes and discuss any books or films they may have read or seen.

1. Pre-teach/check learners know the key words. Teach pron of Colonel /kɜ:nəl/
2. Put learners into groups of 3. Give out the three letters and set a time limit (20-30mins approx) for groups to read all three letters. Groups decide whether they read all the letters together, or each learner reads a different letter and then they pool information. Give them time to discuss the letters and what they think happened (10-15mins).
3. Read out Qs 1-3 in Step 1 and get feedback or give a little more time for discussion. Then read out Qs 4-5.
4. Repeat with Steps 2-3.
5. Give out final letter from Sherlock Holmes to Inspector Gregson and learners check whether their solution was correct.

Contributed by Kate Threadgold, Windermere

Adapted from Material designed and created by former colleague Neville Britten
(Every effort has been made to contact Neville for his permission, but so far we have been unsuccessful)

April 2020

Notes for Teachers

Synopsis: In 1860 Tom Smith, a British soldier stationed in India, steals diamonds from a Hindu temple. The stones are soon recovered and Smith is arrested. But while the diamonds are being held as evidence in his court martial, his commanding officer, Colonel Tosh, substitutes paste diamonds for the real stones: the blame of course is attached to Smith, who spends the next 25 years in prison. When he comes out he returns to Britain and attempts to steal the diamonds from the Colonel. Colonel Tosh keeps the stones in a box together with a snake. Smith burgles the house, puts his hand into the box and is promptly bitten. The criminal realises that he has to cut off his hand to stop the poison from spreading, and so he runs to the house across the road, takes an axe from the garden shed and cuts off his hand – which does not however save his life.

NB This case involves some rigorous deduction, but nevertheless it is fun as groups suggest that Smith has been bitten by ravenous mice, carnivorous plants and so on. Two things to remember: the word *padre* is used in the British army to refer to a priest, though he is usually Anglican and not Catholic. It is true that soldiers guilty of bad conduct had BC tattooed on their bodies at that time: this practice was stopped in 1878.

Adapted from material designed and created by Neville Britten, former colleague at
BC Madrid

Prompts

Step 1 To establish that the burglar in Colonel Tosh's house was Tom Smith

1. Who was the man who cut off his hand in Sir Hugh Drummond's garden shed? (Tom Smith).
2. What evidence do you have that it was Smith? (The dead man had BC (bad conduct) tattooed on his other hand, and there was a wound in his chest received many years earlier when he rescued the Reverend Brown from a mob in India.)
3. And why did Tom Smith rush into Sir Hugh Drummond's garden in the middle of the night? Where had he come from? (Colonel Tosh's house)
4. Well, what is the address of Sir Hugh Drummond's house? (40 Shakespeare Road)
5. And is that significant? (Yes, it is opposite Colonel Tosh's house, no.39)

PAUSE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION IN GROUPS IF NECESSARY

6. What were Colonel Tosh's instructions to his son about the box? (To put a live mouse into it every week, not to look inside, and never, never to put his hand inside.)
7. Why shouldn't he put his hand inside? Are mice dangerous? (No)

Step 2 To establish what had happened to Smith in the Colonel's house

8. So there must be something else in there. What?

PAUSE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION IN GROUPS IF NECESSARY

9. Well, perhaps the mice are food for this thing. Can you think of a dangerous animal which eats mice?

PAUSE FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION IN GROUPS IF NECESSARY

(A snake)

10. Is there any evidence that Smith was bitten? (Yes, there were drops of blood on the box.)
11. And what did Smith do after he was bitten? (He ran to the house across the road to cut off his hand so as to stop the poison from spreading.)

Step 3 To tie together loose ends

12. What was Smith looking for in the Colonel's house? (The diamonds.)
13. And where were they? (In the box.)
14. Who substituted the paste stones for the real diamonds? (The Colonel.)
15. On four occasions diamonds similar to the Mulahabad stones were sold on the London market. How did Colonel Tosh manage that if he was in India? (The diamonds were sold in the four years in which the Colonel visited his son in England.)

Further discussion (if time/next lesson: Is Colonel Tosh guilty of Smith's murder? (Morally yes, but legally?))

39 Shakespeare Road
London
Tuesday 23 March 1886

Dear Mr Holmes,

My name is John Tosh. I am writing to you because something very strange is happening to my father.

I should begin by saying that I don't know my father very well. I was born in India, but when my mother died in 1872 my father brought me back to England and left me at a boarding school. That was when I was six. He visited me in England twice, in 1877 and 1881, but the rest of the time he spent in India with his regiment, the Norfolks. Last year he finally retired and came back to this country. He bought an enormous house here in north London, where we now live together.

Two weeks ago my father fell in the street and broke his leg. He was taken to hospital. When I went to see him he had something very strange to say. 'Listen, John,' he said, 'this is very important. While I am in hospital you must sleep in my bedroom. Keep a revolver under the pillow and - '

'A revolver, Father? But why?'

'Burglars, my boy, burglars. In the cupboard in my bedroom there is a big wooden box with a small hole in the top with a lid. Once a week you must buy a live mouse from the pet shop and put it into the box and then close the lid firmly again. You must not look inside the box and you must never, never put your hand inside. Promise, John.'

Despite my doubts I promised to do what my father said. I thought it was all crazy, but then this morning I woke up with a terrible headache: someone had hit me on the head as I slept. The cupboard door was open and the lid had been taken off the hole in the top of the box. On the box itself there were three drops of blood. I replaced the lid and went round the rest of the house: all the drawers had been emptied on the floor and the armchairs had been cut open. But nothing had been stolen.

I hurried to the hospital to tell my father what had happened. 'And there was blood on top of the box, was there?' he laughed. 'Oh, he won't be back again.' Then he became serious again. 'But not a word to the police, my boy. We don't want any trouble. And tell the servants you got drunk last night and broke everything in the house. Don't mention the burglar.'

What is it, Mr Holmes, what is happening? Has my father been in India too long and gone mad? Or is it more sinister?

John Tosh

Tuesday 23 March 1886

Dear Mr Holmes,

I am writing to you about a most extraordinary event which occurred last night in Shakespeare Road, one of the most exclusive and expensive streets in north London.

Sir Hugh Drummond, the millionaire industrialist, lives at number 40 Shakespeare Road. At three o'clock this morning Sir Hugh was woken by a noise from outside and, looking out of the window, saw somebody moving in the garden. Without turning on a light, Sir Hugh slipped out of bed, called the butler, and the two men went out into the garden.

Sir Hugh and the butler saw that the door of the garden shed had been forced open and that someone was inside. They approached the open door as quietly as they could. There was enough light from a street lamp for them to see a man standing inside with his back to them. They watched as the man searched desperately through the garden tools and then picked up an axe. The stranger, unaware that he was being observed, bent down and, holding the axe in his left hand, placed his right hand on the floor. 'Please God, give me strength,' he said aloud, and then brought the axe down on his right wrist as hard as he could. He stood up, his hand hanging from his wrist only half severed. Again he bent down and chopped at the wrist, and when he stood up again there was no hand on the end of his arm. 'I've done it!' exclaimed the stranger in triumph before he fainted.

All this time Sir Hugh and the butler had been watching, too amazed to speak. They now acted quickly, and put a tourniquet on the man's arm, but the blood continued to flow. A doctor was called, but soon after he arrived the man died. Before he passed away he briefly recovered consciousness and said a few final words. 'Thank the padre,' he muttered, and then died.

When the police arrived they searched the man's clothes but found nothing to identify him. He is aged between fifty and sixty and his face and his arms are dark brown from the sun. There is also a bullet wound in his chest: doctors who examined the body think he received this wound about thirty years ago. And on the man's left hand - not the hand which he cut off - are tattooed the letters BC.

The whole affair is a great mystery, Mr Holmes, and here in Scotland Yard we would appreciate your advice on this very unusual case. I look forward to hearing from you.

Tobias Gregson, Inspector

The Rectory
Little Bissenden
Somerset
Monday 29 March 1886

Dear Mr Holmes,

My name is Ignatius Brown, the Reverend Ignatius Brown. For forty years I was padre to the Norfolk Regiment stationed in Mulahabad in India. There was a corporal in the Norfolks called Tom Smith, and during the great Indian rebellion against the British in 1857 he saved my life. He rescued me from a mob of furious Hindus, although he was shot through the chest as he did it. Smith survived and became a hero; but unfortunately it turned out that the hero was also a criminal.

Near the Norfolks' quarters in Mulahabad there was a Hindu temple famous for its treasure, and in particular for ten big blue diamonds. One morning in 1860 the priests discovered that during the night the stones had been stolen. Colonel Tosh, the commanding officer of the Norfolks, ordered all the soldiers to be searched. The ten diamonds were found in Smith's bed only two hours after the priests had first discovered their disappearance. He was immediately arrested and the diamonds were held as evidence by the military authorities.

Smith's court martial took place a week later. He admitted the crime and Colonel Tosh sentenced him to twenty-five years. But that was not the end of the story. When the diamonds were returned to the temple after the court martial, the priests found that they were false diamonds made of paste. Colonel Tosh said that Smith must have planned to substitute the imitation diamonds for the real ones, but that he was caught before he was able to do so. The Colonel believed that he had hidden the real stones. Smith admitted that he had stolen the diamonds in the first place, but he denied most emphatically that he had substituted false stones for the real ones. Smith spent the next twenty-five years in Calcutta Military Prison, where I visited him several times. The diamonds were never found, though on four occasions - in 1872, 1877, 1881 and 1885 - blue diamonds very similar to the Mulahabad stones were sold anonymously on the London market. You must remember you can change a diamond's appearance by cutting it slightly.

Smith himself was freed last August and I invited the criminal who had once saved my life to come back to England and be my gardener. But last Monday - 21 March - he disappeared and I have not seen him since. I am worried about the man. He is easy to recognise, Mr Holmes: he is aged 58, and has the letter BC - for BAD CONDUCT - tattooed on his left hand like all soldiers who have been in military prison. I would be most grateful if you could try to find him, Mr Holmes.

Ignatius Brown

221B Baker Street
London
Tuesday 30 March 1886

Dear Inspector Gregson,

Thank you for your letter of Tuesday about the strange death of the man who cut off his hand in Sir Hugh Drummond's garden shed in the middle of the night a week ago.

The dead man was Corporal Tom Smith, an old soldier of the Norfolk Regiment. The wound in his chest he received when he heroically rescued the Reverend Ignatius Brown from a mob in India many years ago. The tattoo BC (for bad conduct) he received three years later in 1860 when he stole ten diamonds from a Hindu temple in Mulahabad. His commanding officer, Colonel Tosh also sentenced him to 25 years in prison.

However, while Smith was awaiting court martial Colonel Tosh substituted paste diamonds for the real stones. When the diamonds were returned to the temple and found to be false, Colonel Tosh declared that it was Smith who had done it.

During the next 25 years Colonel Tosh sold diamonds whenever he visited London and eventually retired to a luxurious house in north London. When Smith was released from prison last year he was given a job by the Reverend Brown, the man whose life he had saved in India nearly thirty years before.

Smith determined however to try to regain possession of the diamonds and last Monday night burgled the Colonel's house. Colonel Tosh himself was in hospital with a broken leg when Smith broke in, and the house was in the hands of his son, who knew nothing of the diamonds.

The Colonel kept the stones in a box guarded by a snake in his bedroom. Smith searched the house thoroughly before entering the bedroom, knocking out Tosh junior who was asleep in his father's bed, and then putting his hand into the fatal box that contained both snake and stones. He was promptly bitten.

Having served so long in India, Smith knew that if he wanted to save his life he had to cut off his hand as swiftly as possible. So he ran across the street into Sir Hugh Drummond's garden, found an axe in the garden shed and cut off the poisoned limb. Nevertheless he died soon after. It is fitting that at the moment of his death he displayed the courage, which he had shown as a soldier so many years ago in India.

I suggest that you arrest Colonel Tosh and charge him with the theft of the Mulahabad diamonds, though whether you can also charge him with Smith's murder is less clear.

Sherlock Holmes