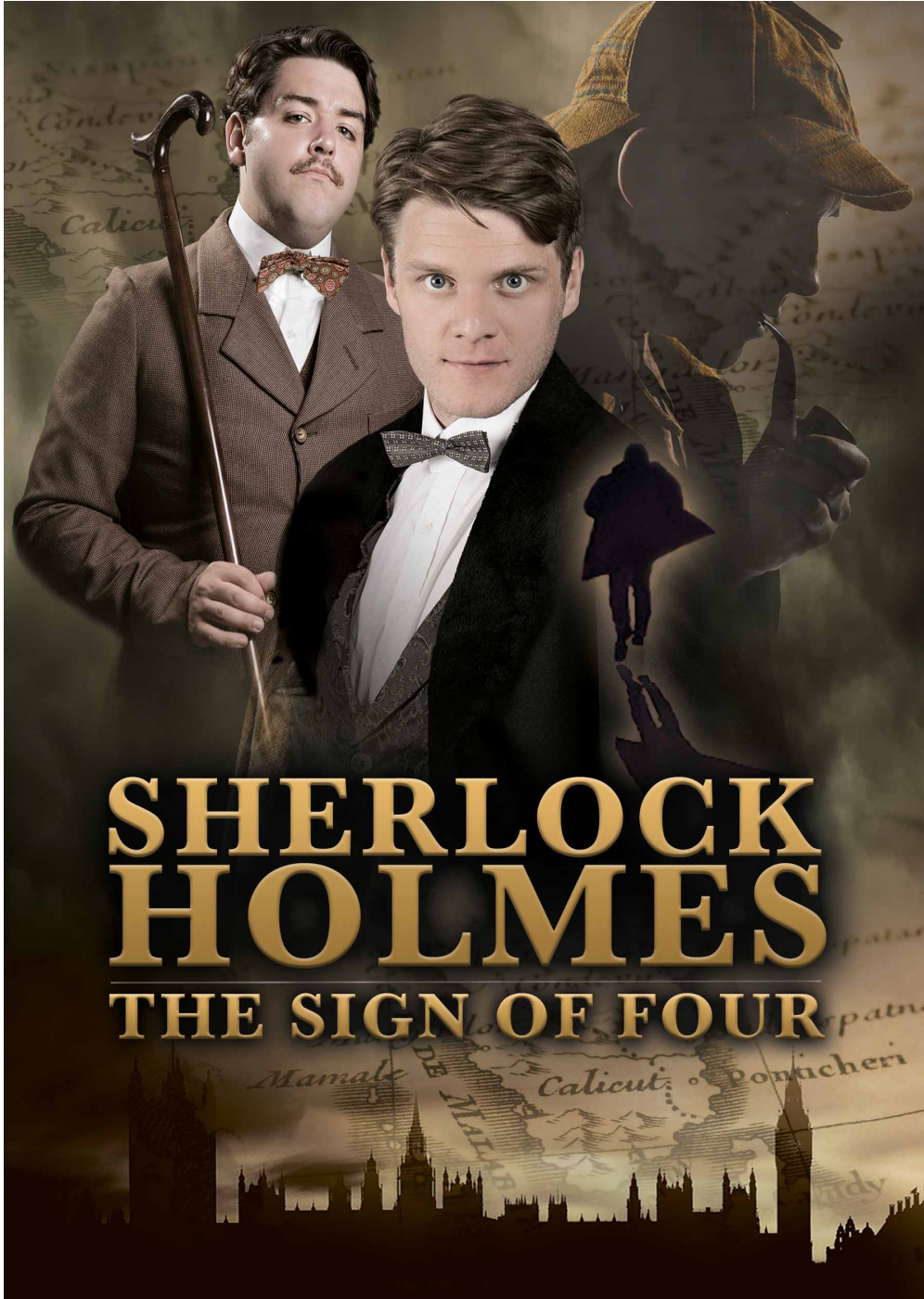


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Education Pack

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born on 22nd May 1859 in Scotland. His father, Charles, was an artist, but never made any great success of his work. His mother, Mary, loved books and storytelling and Arthur loved her stories with a passion.

His father was an alcoholic and sadly ended up being committed to a mental health institution, which would have been called a lunatic asylum at the time. Arthur was sent to boarding school, where beating and corporal punishment were commonplace, and from where he wrote regularly to his mother. Indeed it was Arthur's love for his mother that motivated him to do well in life and overcome a difficult childhood.

Initially Arthur decided to train as a doctor, and it is believed that one of his teachers, Dr Joseph Bell, who had exceptional skills for deduction, reasoning and diagnosis, may well have influenced the creation of Sherlock Holmes. Arthur met several future authors at University and soon began writing short stories.

He spent some time as ship's doctor on a whaling boat in the arctic, a truly incredibly adventure, which he turned into a story, *Captain of the Pole Star*. After another much less successful venture on a boat travelling to the West coast of Africa, he ended up opening his own doctor's practice in Plymouth. It was here that he met his wife Louisa Hawkins, the sister of one of his patients, and together they had a daughter who they named Mary.

It was 1886 when Sherlock Holmes first appeared, in a novel published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. Doyle didn't much like his Sherlock Holmes stories, despite them rapidly becoming world famous. He described them as 'commercial' and felt that his historical novel *The White Company* was the best thing he'd ever written. Eventually however, he began to write regular short stories featuring Holmes and Watson and struck a deal with *The Strand* magazine to publish them. When he wrote the last adventure, *The Final Problem*, in which Sherlock and his arch nemesis Moriarty plunge into the Reichenbach Falls, presumably to their deaths, 20,000 readers cancelled their subscription to *The Strand Magazine*. Sherlock Holmes had become a worldwide phenomenon.

Doyle was quite active politically and stood for office twice as a Liberal Unionist. He famously wrote about the Boer War in South Africa, explaining why he thought the British involvement was justified, and he believed it was for this that he was knighted. He also helped to clear the names of two men who had been wrongly convicted of crimes.

The end of Arthur's life was struck by tragedy. His wife Louisa became very ill with tuberculosis, his father died and he subsequently poured all his energies into the writing that mattered most to him. He also became fascinated by the afterlife and spiritualism.

He died of a heart attack on the 7th July 1930, at the age of 71.

The Characters

Sherlock Holmes

The famous consulting detective, with huge intellect and ferociously powerful skills of observation, inference and deduction. He has achieved renown with his acerbic, blunt personality, and unfailing ability to solve even the most unusual and complex problems. Clients visit him with their mysteries or requests and, should he deem the problem worthy of his time and efforts, he takes the challenge to solve the case. When he is bored, he feels compelled to keep his mind active by using narcotics, playing the violin and reading.

Dr John Watson

John is a medical doctor who meets Holmes via a mutual friend and ends up becoming his roommate. He is our narrator for all of Holmes' adventures, his loyalty to his friend leads him to follow Holmes into a wide variety of dangerous situations. He is straight-laced and approachable.

Mary Morstan

Mary is the 'client' who arrives at 221B Baker St, Holmes and Watson's home, with a mystery to be solved. She is working as a governess, and her father Captain Morstan has gone missing. She has recently started receiving – once every year - a single pearl in the post. She is described as pale and blonde, well dressed but not wealthy, calm, sensible and rational, and of high moral virtue.

Major Sholto

Major Sholto, father of Thaddeus and Bartholomew, was a friend of Captain Morstan, Mary's father. He is approached by Jonathan Small to locate the treasure, and once he retrieves it, he betrays his agreement with Small and keeps it all for himself. When Morstan has a heart attack on confronting Sholto about it, Sholto hides his body and lives the rest of his life in fear of being discovered and tracked down by Jonathan Small.

Thaddeus Sholto and Bartholomew Sholto

Major Sholto's two sons. Bartholomew is found dead inside a locked room in Pondicherry Lodge, having found the treasure his father had hidden. Thaddeus sends the pearls each year to Mary, believing she is entitled to her share of the wealth, now that her father has died. Thaddeus is reclusive, often ill and of a nervous disposition.

Jonathan Small

Small is an escaped convict, arrested for the robbery and murder of Achmet. He is held on the Andaman Islands in a prison camp, where he meets Tonga. He has a wooden leg, having been attacked by a crocodile. Small is one of a group of four men who make a pact, 'the sign of the four', to steal and keep the treasure. In prison, he tells Morstan and Sholto about the treasure. Morstan subsequently finds the treasure and betrays Small, taking it to England. Small and Tonga track them down and Tonga kills Sholto.

Detective Athelney-Jones

Athelney-Jones is a police detective, depicted as somewhat clumsy and slow-witted, in comparison with Holmes. He hastily arrests Thaddeus Sholto for the murder of Bartholomew, but Holmes easily disproves his accusations.

Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan and Dost Akbar

The 'four', along with Small, who conspire to rob Achmet and share the treasure.

Toby

Toby is a bloodhound who Holmes uses for his unfailing powers of smell. He follows the trail of creosote to discover the boat, The Aurora, which Small and Tonga are using to make their escape.

The Baker Street Irregulars

A group of street children who Holmes uses to carry out tasks and gather information. They appear in several stories.

Plot Summary

The first scene of the novel sees Sherlock Holmes, a character already familiar to his readers, taking cocaine. He complains that life is too boring and tedious if his mind is not stimulated. He tries to engage his intellect by deducing where Dr Watson has been that morning and the history of his watch.

A new client arrives at 221B Baker Street, Miss Mary Morstan, whose father went missing 10 years ago. She has recently started receiving a large pearl, delivered to her every year, anonymously. She has also been asked to meet this anonymous sender outside the Lyceum theatre, and she takes Holmes and Watson with her.

The three are taken to Thaddeus Sholto's house, Pondicherry Lodge, which is decorated with lots of artefacts from India. Sholto reveals that not only has Mary's father died, but also she is partial heir to a great hidden treasure. Thaddeus goes on to explain that his father always lived in fear of men with wooden legs, and on occasion struck out at perfect strangers who were so handicapped. On his deathbed, the elder Sholto revealed to his sons the existence of the treasure, but just before he could tell them where it was, the face of a bearded man appeared in the window, and the old man suffered a fatal heart attack.

The following morning, a note was found affixed to the body: it read "Sign of Four". Thaddeus proceeds to explain that after searching for years for the treasure, his brother Bartholomew discovered it in a hidden attic in the family house. On his deathbed, the brothers' father made them swear they would share the treasure with Mary Morstan, who has some unknown claim in the fortune. Thaddeus concludes by entreating the three to accompany him to the family estate where they will divide up the fortune.

Upon arriving at the family estate, however, they discover that Bartholomew is dead and the treasure gone. Holmes notices footprints that he deduces must belong to a man with a wooden leg, while there is a poisoned thorn in Bartholomew's neck and small footprints on the roof made with creosote. Athelney-Jones, a police detective, arrives and arrests Thaddeus, assuming him to be the murderer.

Following up on the creosote footprints, Holmes and Watson borrow a dog to follow the scent. Their search leads them to the edge of the Thames, where it is clear the two criminals hired a boat. Over the next few days, Holmes recruits his "Baker Street Irregulars," a gang of street urchins, to search the river for the boat. When these efforts fail, Holmes, in disguise, makes a search himself, and discovers that the boat – the *Aurora* – has been camouflaged.

That night Athelney-Jones allows Holmes to use a police boat to chase the *Aurora*. When they get close, they see Tonga, a native of the Andaman Islands who is assisting Jonathan Small as a repayment for saving his life. Tonga lifts his hand to fire a poisoned dart through a blowpipe, but Holmes and Watson both shoot at him and he falls into the river. Jonathan Small is captured when his wooden leg gets stuck in the mud and proceeds to confess the full story.

Small explains that while in India, a rebellion against the British occupation took place and he fled to the Agra Fortress. He was approached by three Arab guards and offered a share in a great fortune if he would help them murder the man who carried it. Small agreed. When the man, an emissary from a wealthy sheik, arrived, the three Arabs murdered the man as Small blocked his escape. The four conspirators hid the treasure, but soon after were arrested for the murder of the emissary and sent to Andaman Islands as punishment.

Small bribed two of the guards on the island, Sholto and Morstan (Mary's father), into helping him escape in exchange for a share in the fortune. The two agreed, and Sholto left to bring back the treasure. Sholto did not keep his word, however, and stole the treasure for himself.

Small escaped, eventually tracking down Sholto and arriving just in time to see him die. He leaves a note referencing 'The Sign of Four', and when he returned to the Sholto estate, Tonga murdered Bartholomew and the two stole the treasure.

Small concludes his narrative by revealing that in the course of the chase on the Thames, he threw the treasure overboard. Small is taken to prison, and Watson, who has come to love Mary Morstan, proposes to her.

Form, Structure and Language

The Novella

The Sign of Four is a novella, which is a piece of writing of any style that is too long to be a short story, and too short to be a novel.

The novella was published in instalments in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, in both the UK and the USA, which meant that the readers heard the story in monthly instalments, waiting eagerly for the next episode. Each chapter is organised in such a way that it follows the story chronologically, making it easier for magazine readers to follow, and it left the reader with questions at the end of each chapter, to keep them interested for the next instalment.

The Narrator

Dr Watson narrates the story of *The Sign of Four*. We see the world, events and characters through his eyes. This is sometimes called a Framework Narrator. It can be quite limiting for a story, only to see the story from one person's perspective, so Doyle allows Dr Watson to present other people's versions of events, so we swap narrators without ever losing Dr Watson as the overarching narrator. This enables us to hear from other characters, witness events that Dr Watson doesn't witness and understand other viewpoints. The structure Doyle has chosen for his introduction to each story, that of a client arriving at Holmes' house in Baker Street and presenting their case, and Watson meticulously recording all the details of the case after the event, enables this narration device to work.

The Pathetic Fallacy

The use of language in *The Sign of Four* is complex, and reflects the different characters, moods and events of the story. When the pace of the plot moves faster, so does the language. When we are hearing the thoughts of certain characters, the language changes to reflect that.

Doyle cleverly uses language to create mystery and atmosphere. You can find many examples of Pathetic Fallacy throughout the text, where the author uses human emotions to describe landscape and the natural world.

"It was a September evening and not yet seven o'clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light, which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare...I am not subject to impressions, but the dull, heavy evening, with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make me nervous and depressed."

Stretch Question

Dr Watson is our narrator, and the language he uses gives us insight into his emotions. Can you find passages where the description of the atmosphere or landscape tells us more about what Watson might be feeling? Can you think of how a theatre director or set designer might translate the Pathetic Fallacy into a visual stimulus on stage?

Detective Stories

It wasn't until 1842 that the Metropolitan Police created their Detective branch, partly in response to the shockingly bad impression the force made over their handling of the Whitechapel Murders committed by Jack the Ripper. Previously, the police force had been made up of working class men, and they had no investigation or detective teams at all. The arrival of the 'detective' was met with great interest and this fuelled the increasing popularity of crime and detective fiction.

Detective stories were fairly new when Doyle began writing although Edgar Allan Poe had written a short series of novels in the 1840s featuring a detective called Auguste Dupin. Fiction about crime and 'sensation' novels that drew on real life and fictional events, theft, murder and deception were at their height in the 1860s and 70s.

Most fiction featuring a detective in this period was written in the same way Doyle wrote *The Sign of Four*, as periodicals, published in short sections, bit by bit. It wasn't until Agatha Christie in the 20th Century that detective fiction was published as full-length novels.

The Penny Dreadful

As more people were able to read and printing became cheaper, more and more people were able to access literature. The Penny Dreadfuls or Penny Bloods were a series of cheap, short stories often about serious crime, pirates, highwaymen and detectives. They were hugely popular with the general public, who would wait with anticipation for the weekly episodes to be released.

Stretch Question

How are murder and crime treated in the entertainment industry nowadays? Can you think of at least 5 different examples of modern entertainment - TV, film, radio, podcasts etc - that use serious crime as their key theme? How do the techniques used in these forms of entertainment reflect the same themes and ideas as the 19th Century detective fiction and *The Sign of Four*?

Themes

Crime and Justice

Several crimes are uncovered throughout *The Sign of Four*, from theft to murder. The motivations for these crimes vary hugely, from revenge to self-defence and of course, greed.

Achmet, the merchant whose treasure is stolen, Captain Morstan (Mary's father) and Bartholomew Sholto are all brutally murdered. The murder of Achmet by a Sikh soldier is set against a backdrop of extreme violence in the Indian rebellion. The violence continues throughout the story in London as well, including the shooting of Tonga in the final scenes. Most of these murders are motivated by greed, with a number of the story's protagonists wanting to keep the treasure for themselves.

Justice is represented in several ways, in the form of the law and the police who enforce it, and in terms of fairness and entitlement. Jonathan Small feels he is entitled to his share of the treasure, motivating his actions. Thaddeus Sholto, more kindly, feels Mary Morstan is entitled to her share of the treasure and finds a way to ensure at least some of it reaches her.

"You are a wronged woman, and shall have justice"

Holmes shows considerable contempt for Inspector Athelney-Jones, along with the police force in general, mocking their clumsy detective work. But he isn't motivated by fame so he allows Athelney-Jones to take credit for the resolution of the case, and ultimately works well alongside the police as they continue, reluctantly, to come to him for help.

"When Gregson or Lestrade or Athelney Jones are out of their depths — which, by the way, is their normal state — the matter is laid before me. I examine the data, as an expert, and pronounce a specialist's opinion. I claim no credit in such cases. My name figures in no newspaper. The work itself, the pleasure of finding a field for my peculiar powers, is my highest reward."

"I am not the law, but I represent justice so far as my feeble powers go", Holmes says in *The Adventure of the Three Gables*, a story from *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*, published between 1921-1927 in *The Strand Magazine*

Victorian Fear

As you will see in the section on Detective Fiction and the Penny Dreadful, the Victorians enjoyed being frightened and thrilled. This is a period when violent crime was rife and policing was limited. As the social classes became increasingly divided, the middle and upper classes became increasingly anxious that the working classes would rebel and take revenge. As mobility from continent to continent increased, a manufactured fear emerged about other people, ethnicities and nationalities, often referred to as fear of the 'other', which also manifested itself through the Victorian anxieties over social difference, gender, sexuality, physical ability etc. Rather than shy away from these 'fears', Victorian culture and society tended to become obsessed with them, and so you will see them as recurrent

themes in literature, stage shows and other entertainments of the period, as well as religious teachings and moral writings. Many of these fears and pre-occupations are played out in *The Sign of the Four*.

Thaddeus Sholto perfectly demonstrates the snobbery of the middle classes when he talks of his 'fear' of coming into contact with the rough, working class people in his neighbourhood.

"I have a natural shrinking from all forms of rough materialism. I seldom come in contact with the rough crowd."

Many of the characters live in fear of an unseen evil that can strike at any time. The mystery surrounding the anonymous note and delivery of pearls, the murder in the locked room, and unusual footprints that appear inhuman, Doyle often uses fear of an invisible evil and unseen criminals in his writing.

Tonga embodies many Victorian fears and preoccupations around race, ethnicity and physical difference, as well as the fascination with the 'exotic' and unusual indigenous peoples of other continents.

"They are a fierce, morose, and intractable people... They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features", which Holmes reads in a text about indigenous people of the Andaman Islands.

Betrayal and Greed

Greed and the desire for wealth lies at the heart of the dark and brutal actions in *The Sign of Four*. Jonathan Small is convinced by two Sikh soldiers, Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan, to murder a merchant, Achmet, to steal his treasure. This leads to a series of thefts, betrayals and murders in pursuit of the treasure.

Major Sholto cannot bring himself to share the wealth equally amongst those involved in the plot, betrays Small and hides the treasure. He dies dramatically. No one that comes into contact with it, and acts out of greed, ends up doing well. Only Mary, who does not care for the treasure at all, is unaffected. The moral to the story is that 'crime doesn't pay'.

"...It does seem a queer thing to me, that I who have a fair claim to half a million of money should spend the first half of my life building a breakwater in the Andamans, and am like to spend the other half digging drains at Dartmoor", says Jonathan Small.

The story is set against a backdrop of significant greed displayed through slavery and British Imperialism, the idea that other lands and their people were there for the British to take, by force, and profit from. Slavery and Colonialism is hugely motivated by a capitalist desire to accumulate as much wealth as possible, and we see in both layers of this story that it ends in disaster and suffering.

In contrast, we also see very positive values displayed by Tonga, who vows to be a loyal companion to Jonathan Small, after Small saves his life. Watson continues to show unswerving friendship and loyalty to Holmes, despite Holmes' sometimes-unlikeable nature. Holmes himself shows steadfast loyalty to his clients, never failing to keep his word, however unusual his methods seem.

Historical context

The Sign of Four was written in 1890, when Queen Victoria was in the throne and Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, the Conservative leader and the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, was Prime Minister. 1890 also saw the first council housing built, to try to support the large numbers of extremely poor people in England, and the country saw a sudden recession, often known as the Baring Crisis, when Barings Bank faced collapse after some bad investments and excessive risk-taking.

Class

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, society was heavily divided by class. The upper class was in a position of great power, benefitting from much better living conditions, health care, education and resources. They tended to be in positions of authority, making decisions on behalf of others, responsible for trade and transport. Many didn't work, inheriting wealth from previous generations.

The Industrial Revolution saw the country moved from skilled workers and craftspeople making their own wealth by selling their work, to the creation of huge factories, employing large numbers of people to make large quantities of products often in return for very poor pay, generating wealth for the factory owners. Eventually, factories began to replace the workers with machines, leading to large-scale unemployment. This shift in society served to increase the class divide. Those who owned factories and profited from cheap working class labour, formed a new 'middle' class, with enough wealth to access good education and health care, as well as better living conditions.

These vast inequalities fuelled great conflict, as they do now. The Luddites, mostly textile artisans in the North of England who felt that new machinery would destroy their industry and skills, rioted, destroying factory equipment. In 1825, the Combinations of Workmen Act was passed, preventing workers from striking and Unions from bargaining for better terms and conditions for workers. In 1830 the Swing Riots saw agricultural workers destroy threshing machines all across Southern England.

Eventually, the importance of workers' rights was recognised as trade unions grew in membership and influence during the 1850s and 60s.



The contrast in class fashion in 1871



Covent Garden Flower Women from Street Life in London 1877 (John Thomson Adolphe Smith)

Stretch Questions

What is the class structure like in the UK today? Can you think of any examples of ways in which the classes are in conflict? Look at news headlines from a recent, well publicised strike and see how many differing opinions you can find about it.

Did you know that the UK has a very high level of wealth inequality compared to the rest of the 'developed' world? The richest 10% of people own over 45% of the country's wealth, and the poorest 50% own just 8% of the wealth. That means that if the country were just a village of 100 people with £100 to share between them, then just 10 people would have £45 between them, and 50 people would have only £8 between them.

Slavery and British Empire

British merchants, often extremely wealthy from shipping goods around the world, were amongst the largest perpetrators of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, forcefully shipping men, women and children from West African countries such as Benin, Ghana and Nigeria, to the UK, and on to the Caribbean, South and North America. The slave trade act of 1807 attempted to put an end to the barbaric act in the UK, and petitions began to influence other countries. Slavery across the British Empire was still legal and common right up until the late 1800s, despite a bill passed to abolish the practice in the Empire in 1833. In reality, of course, forced labour continues today.

Between 1815 and 1914, Britain had invaded and laid claim to a huge number of countries, often by force. This included India, Canada, Australia, Barbados, Yemen, Lesotho, Botswana, Kenya, Cameroon, Guyana, Belize, Somalia, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Ghana, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Malaysia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, St Lucia, South Africa, Tonga, Sudan, Zanzibar, Namibia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and 34 others. At one point, a quarter of the world's population was under British rule. Britain shipped thousands of goods between the countries of the Empire, at great profit, often employing slave labour in to produce tea, coffee, fabrics, spices and many other goods.

By the middle of the 19th century, Britain had direct control over India, having spent 100 years manoeuvring and manipulating unstable provincial governments there. In 1857 there was a rebellion by Indian soldiers against the British control of India, resulting in the deaths of thousands of British and hundreds of thousands of Indian people.



The Rhodes Colossus - an iconic editorial cartoon of the Scramble for Africa period, depicting British colonialist Cecil Rhodes as a giant standing over the continent.

In *The Sign of Four*, Jonathan Small talks about being caught up in one of many rebellions that were triggered across the country.

Mahatma Gandhi fought, peacefully, for the independence of India from Britain for most of his adult life. *"We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of slavery"* he said at Congress in Bombay in 1942.

In 1947, Britain finally granted India its independence, but it was not the united, multi-faith India that Gandhi had campaigned for all his life. The British decided to divide the country into two areas, India and Pakistan, along religious lines. This caused massive conflict, and mass mutual slaughters based on faith began between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi began his famous fast for peace, starving himself to generate huge publicity for the plight of the people of India and Pakistan as a result of the British partition. Unfortunately, Gandhi was shot by a Hindu extremist on his way to prayer in 1948.

It is at the peak of the British Empire in 1890 that Doyle was writing *The Sign of Four*. Thaddeus Sholto and his richly decorated house, full of treasures taken by his father from India, reflects some of the wealthy merchants' attitudes to India, and somewhat the British attitude to the country in general. It was often portrayed as colourful, exotic and mysterious, and the practice of displaying Indian artefacts in your home was a public sign of wealth.

The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly-mounted painting or Oriental vase.

Stretch Question

What is the current depiction of India in British film and media? Can you think of any films or TV programmes about the country? What image do they portray? Is it a balanced view, reflecting poverty and wealth, urban and rural landscapes, contemporary and traditional culture, people as human equals participating in normal daily life?

Race

"brown, monkey- faced chap"

"Besides, I don't like that wooden-legged man, wi' his ugly face and outlandish talk."

"This savage, distorted creature."

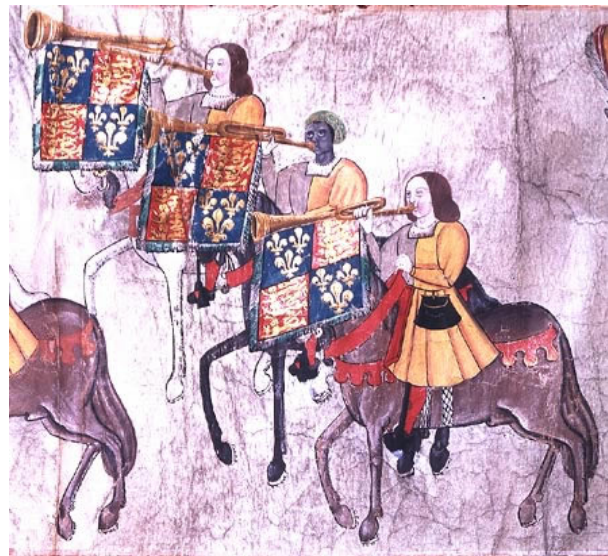
The description of Tonga in *The Sign of Four* reveals a lot about attitudes towards race and ethnicity in Victorian England. He is depicted as barely human, ugly, savage and wild. Jonathan Small describes presenting Tonga as a fairground attraction, which demonstrates how many people of colour and people with dwarfism would have been treated at the time.

"We earned a living at this time by exhibiting poor Tonga at fairs and other such places as the black cannibal."

Representations of African people in literature were particularly dehumanising, and began as soon as people started to travel. The earlier travellers typically were

merchants, discovering African countries to be rich in resources and recognising how they might profit from them. English merchant John Locke, who travelled to West Africa in 1561 to take resources back to the UK, described the people he met as “beasts who have no houses...They are also a people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts”.

At this time the Benin Empire in West Africa was equivalent in wealth and status to the Tudor Empire. Ruled by monarchs, the Benin Empire was wealthy and prestigious. Queen Elizabeth I had a black trumpeter in her court, John Blanke, a very prestigious role to hold. It is likely that John Blanke arrived in England as part of the group accompanying Catherine of Aragon. There had been a permanent community of black African people in the UK since the invasion of the Roman Army, which included African soldiers and officers of high rank, in 300 AD. But colonialism and slavery, amongst other things, fuelled by the desire to control and profit from African and Asian countries, led to attitudes of superiority. Conflict during these invasions led to propaganda about the cause, generating fear of the ‘wild’ ‘savage’ ‘other’. Slavery generated vast wealth for the UK, along with the Americas, and a wave of pseudo-scientific research emerged to justify the African people’s inferiority to white people, aiming to prove these people as half-man half-ape, primitive, jungle creatures without intellect or culture. Even today, you still hear monkey chants at football matches.



Black Trumpeter at Henry VIII’s Tournament - an extract from the 60ft-long Westminster Tournament Roll, showing six trumpeters, one of whom is Black and almost certainly John Blanke

These attitudes begin here and continue during the time of Doyle’s writing. Rudyard Kipling famously wrote the poem “The White Man’s Burden” to support the American colonization of the Philippine Islands. It epitomises the belief of the time that white men had a moral obligation to rule, control and ‘civilise’ those who are not white around the world, exporting, often by force, the British way of living, our culture at the time and our industrial practices.

Stretch Question

Think of examples of how Black and Asian people are represented in the media today. How has it changed? Research the recent controversial H&M hoodies with the slogan ‘Coolest Monkey in the Jungle’, which caused great controversy. Why might this have caused upset? Ask any black students in your class if they are comfortable to talk about how it makes them feel, or how they feel about the representation of Tonga in the story.

Stretch Question

What stereotypes exist about African people? Think of a recent fundraising campaign you have seen that depicts an African person. How do they choose to represent that person? Is it a balanced view? Who benefits from that portrayal? How might it make African people living in the UK feel? How might it affect white British people's attitudes towards African people and black people in the UK?

Women in Victorian England

"She was weak and helpless, shaken in mind and nerve. It was to take her at a disadvantage to obtrude love upon her at such a time. Worse still, she was rich. If Holmes's researches were successful, she would be an heiress. Was it fair, was it honourable, that a half-pay surgeon should take such advantage of an intimacy which chance had brought about? Might she not look upon me as a mere vulgar fortune-seeker? I could not bear to risk that such a thought should cross her mind."

Mary Morstan is a character of great moral principles, her character's strong morality acting as a standard for the other characters in the story. Greed is a key theme throughout the story, and Mary seems to be immune to it. She is portrayed as the ideal lady; sensible, calm, restrained, well dressed but not ostentatious (visibly showing off wealth), so she is liked by both Holmes and Watson, two very different men.

Women in Victorian England were held to very high standards, and gender roles became more strongly-defined than ever before. Men began to work in cities, often commuting from home and leaving women at home to carry out the domestic work and childcare. Women were considered more suited to this sort of work, as they were perceived to be physically and emotionally weaker than men, easily upset and to be protected, but also morally superior to men, and therefore better suited to teaching and raising children. This often meant that men could behave in ways that women could not. For example promiscuity, drinking and minor discretions would be overlooked in men but considered unacceptable in women. Women were held to an incredibly high standard. Middle class women were no longer taught practical skills, but instead music, singing, dancing, drawing, embroidery and languages, but they were not to be too academic. This was all intended to make women more attractive to men.



Society was as fascinated with the moral, calm, genteel feminine woman as it was with the bawdy,

A Victorian shoe-fitting device to protect a woman's modesty (Paul Townsend)

rough working class woman, the sex worker or bar maid. This fascination in society, reflected in literature and art for centuries, is often known as the 'Madonna' (mother of Jesus) or 'Whore' dichotomy, where as soon as a woman slips from her angelic, morally perfect pedestal, she becomes the other extreme - the whore – with nothing between the two.

Despite a woman sitting on the throne, women's rights in Victorian Britain were not considered equal to men. Women could not vote, own property, sue someone or divorce their husbands on any grounds. When a woman and man married in Victorian England, the woman signed over all her possessions and any future income to her husband. She couldn't own a house or land, and so if her husband left her or died, she would become destitute. She also signed over ownership of her body and was expected to provide her husband with whatever he desired, sexually or reproductively. Legal protection from domestic violence was not enshrined in law until 1824.

Stretch Questions

The Madonna-whore complex represents two women, at two extremes, one that is untouchable, perfect and pure, and the other that is sexualised and desirable. What do these two representations mean in terms of women's identity? What pressures might young women face growing up seeing this image again and again? Can you think of examples in modern culture where women are portrayed as either morally perfect and pure, or tainted and corrupt and sexual, like Sandy in the musical *Grease*?

What similarities and differences are there between a woman's place in society in the 1890s and today? Can you think of progress that has been made in legal rights? How, if at all, have these impacted on the stereotypes, expectations and pressures women face in society now? Have a conversation with a girl in your class. Is she aware of any pressures she faces purely because of her gender?

Research the gender pay gap, the #metoo campaign and International Women's Day. What action might you take to further women's rights in the UK and globally?

The Production

There have been more than 14 adaptations of *The Sign of Four* on film, TV, radio and stage. Blackeyed Theatre's interpretation will be slightly different again. An ensemble cast of actor-musicians will take all the characters between them, switching quickly and fluidly from character to character.

Adapting *The Sign of Four* for the Stage

From writer and director, Nick Lane

I approached the adaptation of this novella very carefully! I wanted to get the elements of a good procedural thriller in there, and also I was keen on retaining the essence of Holmes; his unusual manner, his relationship with Watson and so on. This is one of the early novels - it's the second full length book after *A Study in Scarlet* - so Holmes and Watson's relationship is in its early stages, I'd say - they're still young men, so I wanted to capture that friendship without it being too stale and stuffy. I also think that quite often Holmes can be presented as pastiche and I didn't want to do that - he's an easy character to send up I'd have thought - so maybe I just like making the job harder for myself!

The friendship between these men is a key element. I was keen on getting across how fond of one another these two men are, despite their obvious differences. Again I think it's probably an easy trap to fall into to portray Watson as a bit of a buffoon - comic relief, almost. It's never how I've seen him - not only is he our narrator (since all the stories are written from his unique perspective), he's also a man with significant medical knowledge. I'd liken it to getting into Oxford to study Physics only to find that your lab partner is Stephen Hawking!

In selecting our cast, we have to draw out key aspects of each character. With Holmes, it's a measure of coolness - he's not lacking in passion; he just hides it remarkably well behind his intellect. Watson is almost the opposite - he is a man who cannot hide his emotions; they often guide his actions. You're also looking to find two actors that gel together well. Mary Morstan, who brings the case to the pair... she becomes Mary Watson in future stories, and it'd be easy to relegate her to the role of damsel in distress - Doyle again doesn't focus a huge amount on her in this book - but I was looking for someone with spirit - someone who wore their heart on their sleeve just as openly as Watson does. I'd say those were the three main characters

The origins of the crime in *The Sign of Four* are rooted in the Indian rebellion of 1857; a time when British Colonial rule was brutal, draconian and cruel. Of course Doyle was writing for a Victorian readership who didn't take quite such a revisionist view but I wanted to give the characters, and thereby the audience, a sense that they at least were aware of what was going on and didn't like it. You run the risk, doing something like that, of veering too far away from the source material so it's a fine line; how far do you go, how much do you say and so on. I'd like to think it works - the chapter with the reveal is the longest in the book and we've honoured that... and at the same time deepened one of the relationships in this version as well as offering further motivation for the crime.

I've always been a fan of crime fiction and I love detail and nuance in character - Doyle provides both expertly. The relationships are beautifully crafted and the cases leave you

exactly where Watson is; marvelling at Holmes' logic (and equally fascinated by how Doyle created the mysteries in the first place).

This text really does stand the test of time. I think that as long as people remain fascinated by human weakness and the tendency to turn to crime to suit a criminal's ends there will always be a place for Sherlock Holmes. His emotionless logic and whiplash intelligence will always cut through the emotions of crime.

Blackeyed Theatre often use an ensemble cast, with the few actors playing multiple roles. We also like to use music in interesting ways. This production will blend recorded and live sound, which I'm really excited about - we've played around with a couple of ways in which we use the music and incorporate it into the story and I think we're there now. As for the ensemble cast, Holmes and Watson largely only play themselves but the other actors are required to play a variety of other characters, and they are more than capable of that!

Creating Music for the Show

From composer, Tristan Parkes

Many people wonder what comes first when composing music for the stage. Do you write the music in advance and block the action to it? Or watch the blocked action and compose music to it?

In my experience a combination of both approaches is best as both the director and the composer want the luxury of less guess work. Certainly you can't expect the music or the action to be a perfect fit first time every time and like every relationship it requires discussion and a little compromise.

The process starts with me reading the script and deciding on the mood of the music needed, where the mood is towards the end of a scene and where it's going in next scene. And of course, sometimes the music needs to completely contradict the action to create a juxtaposition or dramatic irony. Otherwise it can become too obvious and make the play overly sentimental or melodramatic.

From a first reading of the script I usually estimate in seconds how much music is needed. Quite often I'll make a list of cues and work down the list methodically. The danger here, particularly when writing ahead of the rehearsal schedule and outside the rehearsal room, is you'll write a completely different show from the one in the director's head. This is where meetings and discussions ahead of rehearsals are invaluable, before all the actors (actor-musicians in this case) get into the room and begin rehearsing.

The good thing about my working relationship with Nick Lane is it goes back to 1998 when we first started working professionally together. So although I can't read his mind, I have a good idea what will fit his directorial style.

That said, Nick is very imaginative and open to ideas and is always up for trying something new. Equally, I know he likes big Hollywood sounding film scores and quite often this is what theatre audiences also enjoy too. As a society we spend a lot of time watching films on TV and at the cinema, so there's a familiarity with its musical language. Plus who doesn't like an uplifting dramatic crescendo?!

My initial thoughts on writing *Sherlock Holmes: The Sign of Four* is to research composers of the Romantic period and build on my own knowledge of traditional Indian music. Having spent some time in India in recent years and having begun learning how to play the Sitar, I'm keen to fuse elements of Western and Indian music. Not to give away any spoilers, but this pairs with the play's narrative.

Of course, what's exciting about working on a new production is the freedom it gives you. You're not bound by stereotypical or obvious musical choices. The original music ultimately will be a layer that's external to the dialogue. So it can be quite contemporary despite the period in which the story's set. Famous film composers like Hans Zimmer and Vangelis will use synthesisers and electronics for films with narratives set before the invention of electronic instruments. I may use some electronic rhythms and a bass synthesiser underneath the live playing of traditional instruments. I will certainly experiment and that of course is the most exciting and crucial factor in composing music.

Creating Costumes

By Costume Designer, Naomi Gibbs

As a long-time fan of Sherlock Holmes, I was thrilled - to say the least - when Blackeyed theatre approached me about costume designing for this production. It seems quite serendipitous to me that I should be doing this now, having lived on the very street where Arthur Conan Doyle's practice was located (1 Bush Villas, Southsea) where he actually wrote *The Sign of Four*. I named my youngest son after the author. Oddly I am simultaneously designing *Peter Pan*, and of course Arthur Conan Doyle and J.M Barrie were firm friends! The stories of Sherlock are, it seems, a through-thread in my life.

I started with the script. It was important to me to try to strip back all of my preconceptions about Sherlock Holmes while I read Nick's script, as though encountering the tale for the first time, primarily because the source material for my design concepts should always have the script at the very heart.

The Sherlock you'll meet in our production has not deviated from the iconic character you'll already know through popular culture. Although we'll have interesting, slightly abstract ideas in the set, beautifully designed by Victoria Spearing, the natural and period-appropriate way in which the characters will be clothed will hopefully assist in suspending audience disbelief.

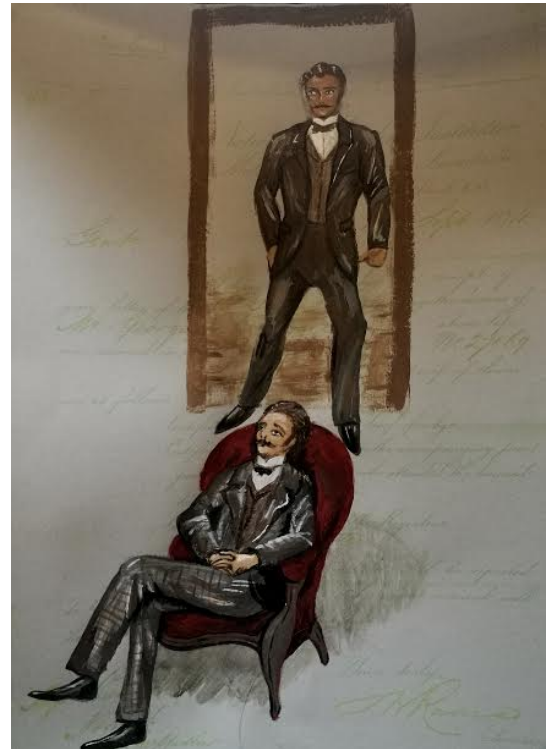
The play is set in the late 1880s (except for flashback scenes), during which men's clothing was not undergoing major changes in silhouette, yet the ladies' cut was slowly turning away from the extreme bustle shapes that had endured much popularity. 1888 saw the Victorians still in the throes of bustle fascination, but I believe Mary Morstan would wear a moderately sized bustle pad. Mary is a practical and earnest character with sense and intelligence. Being a governess of respectable but working class, I imagined that she'd opt to clothe herself



Initial design for Mary Morstan

modestly in something that would last but have a simple elegance. The colour of her attire should match her personality and give dignity alongside unassuming gentle beauty. So I chose a greyish tinged forget-me-not blue with typical ivory accents, though certainly not too much fussy lace. I hope to incorporate some of the antique Victorian handmade crochet lace in my collection. Mary's gown will be lightly distressed after completion, because she'd be getting as much wear from her garments as possible before retiring them. Her bodice was inspired by an original garment of the era, which I felt was very resourcefully and inventively created with a refinement in simple details rather than fanciful frou-frou, which seemed to work with her personality. It's likely I will make this up in cotton or wool suiting or perhaps matte crepe, bypassing the fancy taffetas and silks, which would be unfitting.

For Sherlock and Watson, I took great joy in referring back to the artists who illustrated Conan Doyle's printed short stories, most notably Sidney Paget, who created hundreds of illustrations for the Sherlock stories, and Frederick Dorr Steele who is attributed to nailing the iconic accessories of the calabash pipe and deerstalker hat to Holmes' image forever (though not the first to include them in Sherlock illustrations). There are many artists who contributed illustrations for various publications to accompany the Sherlock stories, some of who are uncredited. Such a wealth of imagery contemporary with the original story is really such a jewel of a resource for someone tasked with designing clothes for actors to bring the famous duo to life. I am yet undecided as to whether to include a deerstalker with Mr Holmes' wardrobe. An impish part of me wants to buck the expectation and omit it as I never much liked it anyway! Also, I happen to have the insider-knowledge that our writer and director Nick Lane has more than a passing distaste for hats on stage, so their use will be limited. The pair will be outfitted with attire including a starched collar shirt, tie or cravat, formal trousers, waistcoat and jacket, as much of the action happens outside. Colours were generally more sober for gentlemen (Thaddeus Sholto excepted from the rule) due to a desire for practicality, economy and general good taste and longevity of wear. For Sherlock, he'll cut a fine figure in black, whereas Watson will don the more relaxed hues of brown, hopefully in a tasteful city tweed. Because he's more accessible as a character, we can perhaps relate more to him on a personal level. The way I see it, he is our mediator, translating the action between the incredible genius of Holmes and the rest of the waking world. Neither should look wealthy and I am hoping to get a worn rather than sharp look into their garments.



Costume design for Holmes

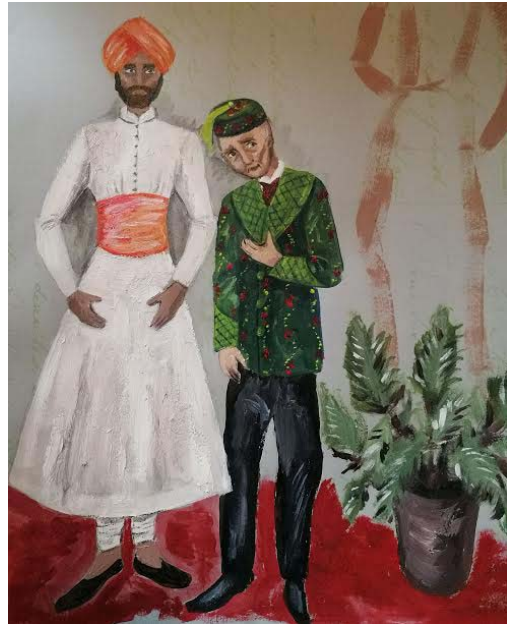
The actor who plays Adnan, Chowdar, Dost Akbar, Khan and Athelney-Jones will need to 'wear many hats' in the literal sense, so his changes need to be slick, easy and have a 'tourable' convenience (as do the others). So for him, I have decided to use a base costume to suit the majority of his characters, whilst giving it separate personalities to assist the audience to identify each with the use of pre-tied fixed turbans, which I have researched to be culturally appropriate for his roles. Designing for these characters has given me a wonderful opportunity to explore new streams of research which I hadn't yet had occasion to

delve into: traditional Indian costume. A consideration which is really coming to the forefront of the minds of costume designers, recently more so than ever, are the ever-evolving (and hopefully progressive) attitudes to the appropriate use of garments belonging to cultures and ethnicities that are not the designer's own. It's important for designers to ensure that the use of cultural garb is respectful and fits the period (and must be well researched so as to be used in correct context). The Victorians were obsessed with Oriental (in the Victorian sense of the word) textiles, so you'll see motifs of this throughout my designs as it suits some of the characters and their backgrounds. A modern designer aims not to misappropriate a culture's art when clothing the cast, but they may be saying through the clothes that the generation the characters belonged to most certainly did.

My intention with the use of colour is to help create a clear distinction for the flash back scenes, and to give a feeling of the different flavours between India and Victorian London.

Jonathan Small's peg leg creates an interesting costuming challenge, so I'll be discussing my design ideas with a prop maker. To compliment his wooden leg, he'll be wearing a very worn-in dusty and dirty coat and a tattered scarf.

Overall, my job is to help the actors tell the story, so for each design I make sure I ask myself key questions about the characters such as; How wealthy are they? What is their standing in society? How much does this person care about their appearance? What is their profession or occupation? What are their personal tastes? The clothes have to suit each criteria. Then, I must meet additional criteria such as 'Can this actor move freely in their costume?', 'Is it fit for purpose?' For each question I can take my cues from the script.



Costume design for Thaddeus Sholto

As I write this on the first of June, I have just completed my designs, having had a production meeting last week with the rest of the team, sharing ideas and nailing down which ideas to pursue and which to discard. Next week, I'll be spending a weekend in London, selecting ideal fabrics for my designs from my favourite suppliers, many of which are run by Sikh families who specialise in beautiful ranges of textiles to suit the production.

Set Design

By Designer, Victoria Spearing

Here is an initial conceptual sketch for our new production of *The Sign of Four*. Having met with the production team and read the script, I start to look for inspirational images to start the design process. My search can be inspired by specific locations in the script or themes running through the play. You often find the most unexpected image can spark the start of the design process.

The story includes many locations, including Sherlock's study, flash backs to India, the docks of London and the deck of a ship, and representing all of them naturalistically

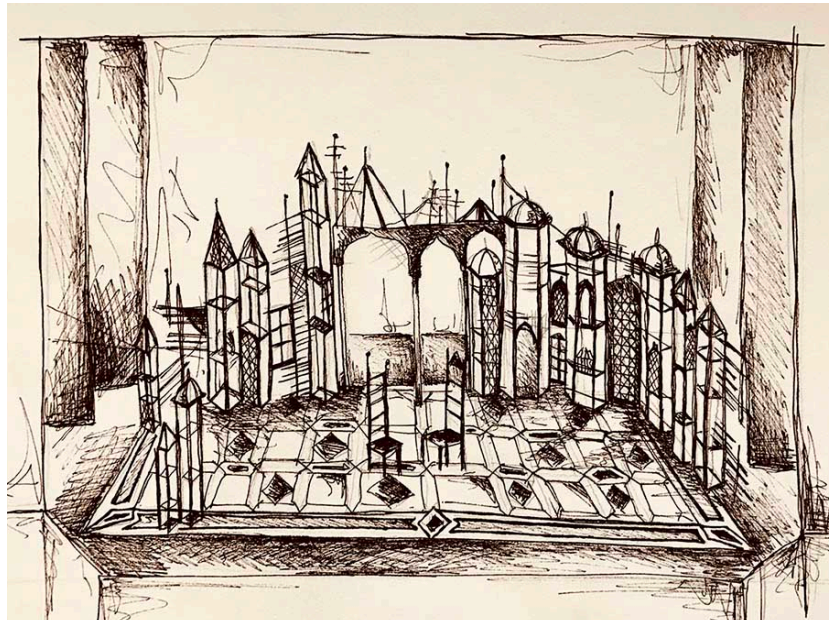
would be almost impossible, particularly for a touring production. As a production team it was decided a non-naturalist structure framing the acting space would be the best direction to go.

From my initial image research I was drawn to Indian floors and wanted to feature these in the floor design. But keeping in mind our desire to be non-specific in terms of location, I hope the audience might see both an old Victorian tiled floor and an Indian rug. This desire to blur the lines is reflected in the sculptural structure. Hopefully the set hints at a London sky line bleeding into the towers of an Indian temple.

By creating a more skeletal structure at the back that hints at architectural shapes from London and India I wanted to add some detail. The script suggested walls crumbling away revealing lath and plaster. While researching relevant images, I was also drawn to detailed cut-out Indian screens and felt that including elements of both in our back wall was more exciting than solid flats. These textural elements, when lit, will instantly transport the audience from a London scene to the sun's rays beating their way through an Indian window shutter for example. A subtle lighting change working with the set can transform the whole stage space.

The suggestions of windows or doorways in the structure are kept ambiguous so the way the cast interacts with them allows a single doorway to be Sherlock's study door, then in another scene the doorway of a dockworker perhaps.

To complement the non-naturalistic backdrop, I wanted a selection of stylised furniture, which the cast can rearrange to create different locations. Two high back chairs from a house can be laid on their sides to make the bow of the boat. Sometimes all the audience needs is a reconfigured set of furniture to transport somewhere completely different.



Victoria's initial design concept for the *Sign of Four* set

A new piece of writing gives a designer endless possibilities and directions to take the production in, but as the designer sometimes practical requirements are as big an influence. For example, the amount of time the team has to 'get in' to a theatre helps dictate how complex the set structure can be. As a touring company we have learnt a printed dance floor is easier to lay than a painted wooden one. There is more to consider than just the final look of the set. How will the set stand up on a raked or flat stage, for example?

Now we have an initial conceptual sketch we will discuss the design again, maybe discard elements, tweak bits and then turn the sketch into a white card model. Once agreed, it will be finished as a painted design that the build and paint team will work from to create the full size set that you'll see on stage.

CAST



Luke Barton
Sherlock Holmes

Luke trained at the Oxford School of Drama.

His recent credits include ***The Unexpected Guest*** and ***Spider's Web*** (The Mill at Sonning, directed by Brian Blessed), ***Twelfth Night, Romeo & Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream*** and ***Henry V*** (UK Tour for Merely Theatre), ***Reunion, Echoes, Absent*** and ***After Three Sisters*** for Living Record Productions (Edinburgh Festivals and Brockley Jack Theatre), ***Misterman*** and ***L'Etranger*** (Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse).

Luke is delighted to be touring with Blackeyed Theatre.

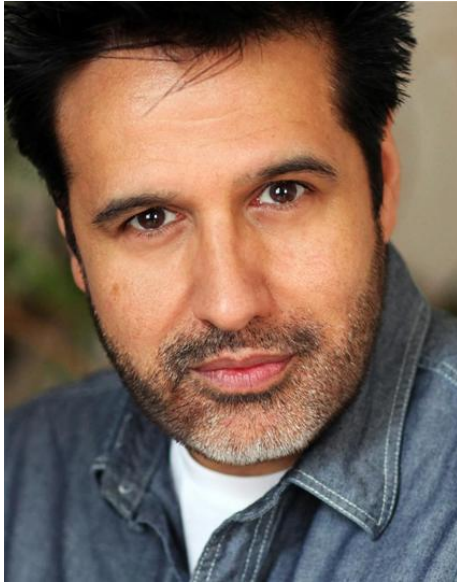


Joseph Derrington
Dr John Watson

Joseph graduated from The School of The Arts (University of Northampton) in 2014. He has since worked with directors Laurie Sansom, James Farrell (RSC Associate Director) and Jamie Rocha Allan (Frantic Assembly and Associate Director, RSC).

His theatre credits include ***The Canterville Ghost*** (Erasmus Theatre touring Italy), ***Stinkville*** (Arletty Theatre: UK Tour), ***The Importance Of Being Earnest*** (Bruiser Theatre at MAC Theatre Belfast), ***Tyke*** (Arts Theatre and Edinburgh Fringe), ***The Lost Carnival: The Battle Of The Carnivals*** (LAS Theatre/Wild Rumpus Theatre), ***The Dumb Waiter*** (Maltings Arts Theatre, St Albans), ***The Bacchae*** (Royal & Derngate) and ***The Crucible*** (Looking Glass Theatre).

His screen credits include ***Birdsong*** (Working Title) and ***William And Mary*** (Granada Television).



Christopher Glover

Dost Akbar, Adnan, Chowdar, Athelney-Jones, Khan

Christopher has performed extensively in the UK, Ireland and Australia, and he was an original member of Irish theatre company, *Tinderbox*.

His recent theatre includes *Aladdin* and *Alice in Wonderland* (16feet), *Peckham The Soap Opera* (Royal Court), *Who Cares* (Royal Court) and *5 Steps* (Royal Court Tottenham).

His film/TV credits include *Eastenders* (BBC), *Touching Evil* (ITV), *Rules of Engagement* (ITV), Dennis Potter's *Karaoke* (BBC/Channel 4), *The Bill* (ITV), *Underworld* (Hat Trick/Channel 4), *Hollyoaks* (Lime Pictures / Channel 4) and *Casualty* (BBC). He was in the 2014 film *Heard* and last year *America's War On Drugs* (Talos Films) as Mexican Drug Lord "El Chapo".

In Australia, his theatre credits include *Constance Drinkwater* (Darwin Festival/Tour), *7 Deadly Australian Sins* and *Gods of Spicy Things* (Australian Tours). He also played three characters in Scott Witt's comedy *Macbeth*. As Associate Director of Jute Theatre Australia, he directed the original productions of *Cake* (Tropic Sun/JUTE Tour), *The Shining Path* (Queensland Tour) and *Dancing Back Home* (Mudlark Tasmania), while his play *The Mad Mile* was nominated for several awards.

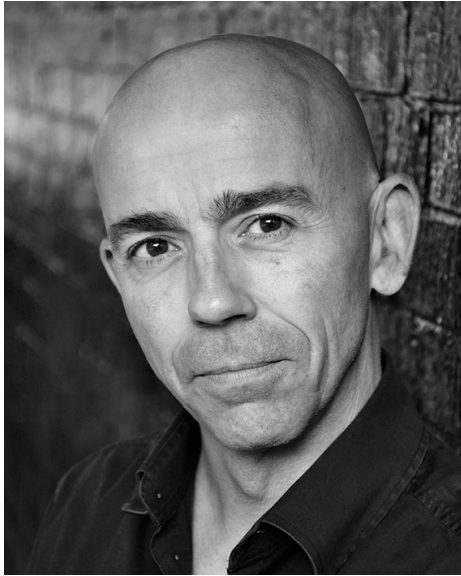


Ru Hamilton

Thaddeus Sholto, Major Sholto, Sherman, Thomas

Trained at Rose Bruford College, Ru is an actor, singer, musician, composer and musical director. He plays the cello, clarinet, flute, saxophone, piano, double bass and ukulele.

Theatre credits include *Tipping The Velvet* (Lyric, Hammersmith), *Treasure Island* (Birmingham Rep), *Peter Pan* (Derby Theatre), *Farm Boy*(Mercury, Colchester), *Roundelay* (Southwark Playhouse), *Titus Andronicus* (Smooth Faced Gentlemen), *Fragment R&D* (Iron Shoes) and *Rise*(Old Vic New Voices).



Zach Lee

Jonathan Small, Captain Morstan, McMurdo, Matthews

Zach trained at The Arts Educational School a long time ago!

His recent work in theatre includes ***The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*** (Blackeyed Theatre UK tour) ***Bouncers, A Weekend In England, Glass Menagerie, Dr Faustus, Frankenstein, Wuthering Heights, Little Malcolm And His Struggle Against The Eunuchs, A Christmas Carol, Unleashed*** and ***Reunion***, for which he received a nomination for Best Actor at the 2003 Manchester Evening News Awards (all Hull Truck), ***The Derby McQueen Affair*** (York Theatre Royal), ***Round The Twist*** (Eastern Angles), ***The Winters Tale*** (Nulty/Pilton Productions), ***Treasure Island*** (Harrogate Theatre), ***South*** (Shred Productions), ***Five Kinds of Silence*** (Stepping Out Theatre), ***The Wife*** (Rude Mechanicals), ***Romeo & Juliet, 100, Some Voices*** (Alchemy Theatre Co), ***Moby Dick*** and ***Frankenstein: Revelations*** (Theatre Mill) and ***Monopoleyes*** (Stolen Thread). He has written & produced two plays, ***Geoffrey Ramsbottom - Man of the 90s*** (Tabard Theatre) and ***Two Brothers And One World Cup*** (Underbelly, Edinburgh Festival then UK Tour).

His television credits include ***Emmerdale, Coronation Street, Crime Traveller, Class Act*** (ITV), ***Young Dracula*** (CBBC), ***In The Club*** (BBC), ***The Contract, Sickness And Health, Feelgood Factor*** (CH4), both series of Lynda La Plante's ***The Governor*** (ITV) and ***Underbelly*** (CH 9 Australia).

His feature Films include ***Chasing Dreams, Hard Edge*** (DMS Films), ***Mortal Fools*** (Virtual World Productions) and ***The Creature Below*** (Dark Rift Films).

Zach is a Fingerstyle guitar player and his YouTube Channel "Zach Lee Guitar" shows him playing a wide range of arrangements including Classical, Jazz, Spanish, Pop and Blues.



Stephanie Rutherford

Mary Morstan, Mrs Hudson, Mrs Smith

Stephanie trained at Rose Bruford in Actor-Musicianship, graduating in 2015 with first class honours.

Theatre credits include ***Kubla Khan*** (Oily Cart), King Leontes/Mariner/Sheep in *In a Pickle* (Oily Cart: UK/USA Tour), ***Mirror Mirror*** (Oily Cart), Annie in ***The Frugal Horn*** and ***Now That's What I Call Music*** (Presence Theatre), ***Pulse*** (Bamboozle), ***Down To Earth*** (Bamboozle/Imaginate Festival), Gretel in ***Hansel and Gretel*** (Bamboozle/ Leicester Curve), Sister/Teeth the Rat in ***Cinderella*** (Derby Theatre) and Vicki in ***My Filthy Hunt*** (Holden Street Theatres, Adelaide Fringe).

Drama Activities

The Narrator

Divide the class into small groups. Each group must nominate a narrator. The rest of the group creates a tableau or a silent re-enactment of a scene and the narrator must narrate the story of the tableau to the audience. They can do this with the narrator's knowledge, or keep it a secret from the narrator and rely on their powers of improvisation. You can use scenes from the story, or create your own.

What do they notice about playing the narrator, how does it impact on the scene? Does it add feeling, or humour where there might not have been any? Does it enhance or detract from the scene. Does the narrator get the story right, when they are guessing? How well does the tableau or silent scene reflect the mood intended?

To develop the activity ask your students to consider the relationship that the narrator has to the story and the other characters. What happens when the narrator is also one of the characters within the scene? How does this affect their perspective on the action and the other characters? Who would the narrator have to be in order to be omni-present and all knowing, what role could they take?

The Detectives

Choose a group of students to represent each character in the story, including Holmes and Watson. Give this group ten minutes to decide upon a different ending to the mystery of the Sign of Four. The rest of the group will also have ten minutes to decide on questions to interrogate the characters with. This group will interview each character for only two minutes per person, to try to determine the new ending of the story. The students being interviewed must stay in character at all times, and those playing Mary Marston, Watson and Holmes must not lie at any point (but the interviewers must not know this).

What new elements do they notice about the characters of the story during this activity, and what elements do they create? How easy is the role of detective and how good are the characters at lying? What makes a good performance in this context?

The Atmosphere

Explore Doyle's use of powerful atmosphere. One person leaves the room the rest decide on an emotion or atmosphere, try to create it and the person re-enters, walks through the space and tries to guess the intended atmosphere

Look at the quote on 8, under the heading 'Pathetic Fallacy'. Pick out all the adjectives and descriptive words in this passage. How many are there? Think about how you might design a theatre set to create the scene and atmosphere described here. How would you ensure the audience felt the same emotion that Watson feels? How would you design your set? What special effects? Would you choose something realistic, or representative?

The Chase

The Sign of Four contains a variety of tension states, from Holmes drug-induced inertia to a high speed boat chase, use this simple activity to explore those tension states in performance.

Draw a circle on the board and place the 7 tension states as described by Jacques LeCoq along the circle. Explain what each of the tension states are, give an example. State 1 – lie on the floor with no tension, asleep state, exhausted, floppy like a jellyfish. State 2 –a lazy state, you can barely move, very tired, drunk, very chilled out. State 3 – neutral state, economical, resting state, like a cat resting on a wall. State 4 – Alert, curious, you've noticed something interesting. State 5 – Suspense. You're unsure, a bit anxious, hesitant but hyper alert. State 6 – Passionate. That's a bomb! Strong tension through the body, great anxiety, fear. State 7 – Tragic. The bomb is about to go off, panic, body is rigid with complete tension.

Ask the group to stand spread out in the room, and find a fixed point on the other side of the room, such as a light switch, and walk towards it. When they find that thing, ask them to look at it. Then ask them to pick another point, and this time, ask them to walk towards it in one of the tension states. Then they select again and you increase the tension state each time.

Now consider The Sign of Four, can you find scenes in which each of these tension states is present in the characters? Read extracts from those scenes in what you think is the correct tension state, then try the opposite tension state. How does it affect the scene? Does it change the mood? Choose a section of dialogue between two or more characters and play each character with an extremely different tension state. How does this change the scene?

Evaluating the Performance

We hope that you are looking forward to your visit to see Blackeyed Theatre's production of Sherlock Holmes: The Sign of Four.

In order to maximise your students understanding of the show we have created a number of questions about the different 'lenses' through which your students can watch the show. These lenses allow the students to focus in on the performance elements, and analyse them in the moment.

Some students may find it helpful to make notes during the show, others may prefer to concentrate fully on the production and make notes afterwards. You can also choose whether to allocate groups to look specifically through different 'lenses' during the show, or ask all students to cover all areas.

Performances

How do the actors share the roles?
How does the audience identify the characters?
How would you describe the acting style/s?
Is there a particular performer that stands out and why?
How do the actors physicalise the characters?
Are some characters more stylised than others, and why?
Observe the choreography within the piece?
How is the 'ensemble' used?
How have the cast created the 'visual' images within the piece?

Lighting

How does the lighting create atmosphere? How is lighting used to help tell the story? Can you identify lighting techniques used in the show?

Costume

How have costumes been used to help indicate different characters? Where and when do the characters change costumes?

Story

What happens in each scene?
Is the story clear?
Break the story down into different sections.
What happens during the transitions?
What themes are apparent?
Identify moments of tension, suspense, conflict, how did these engage you as an audience member?

Visual Design/ Set

Sketch the main scenic elements.
How are the different places created?
Why does the set look the way it does?
What are the visual qualities of the set?
What moves and what is static? How are the projections being used?

Music and Song

Where is music used within the show and why has the composer chosen these moments?
What effect does this have on your understanding of the story?
How would you describe the style of music?
Which actors play which instruments?
What does live music add to the production?
What are the logistical challenges to using live and recorded music in a theatre production?

Blackeyed Theatre

Blackeyed Theatre is one of the UK's leading touring theatre companies. Since 2004 we have been creating exciting opportunities for artists and audiences by producing theatre that's audacious, accessible and memorable. Blackeyed Theatre has two principal objectives through the work it produces; to provide audiences and artists with fresh, challenging work; and to make that work sustainable by reaching as wide and diverse an audience as possible. Over the past few years, Blackeyed Theatre has balanced these artistic and business objectives by creating new, exciting versions of established classics in unique ways and by identifying relevance with today's audiences.

Production Team

Writer and Director	Nick Lane
Composer	Tristan Parkes
Set Designer	Victoria Spearing
Costume Designer	Naomi Gibbs
Lighting Designer	Claire Childs
Company Stage Manager	Caroline Sheard
Producer	Adrian McDougall

Workshops

Practical workshops, facilitated by practitioners from Blackeyed Theatre, are available for schools. These cover the technique of multi role-playing and explore the themes within the piece.

To book or to enquire about a workshop, please contact adrian@blackeyedtheatre.co.uk

About this Pack

This pack was written by Liz Allum and Danielle Corbishley with contributions from the artistic team.

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