

A Reader's Theatre Adaptation for English Language Learners

Based on The Adventure of the Three Students by Arthur Conan Doyle

Characters and Descriptions

Narrator: Helps tell the story and describe actions; shares background information

Sherlock Holmes: A brilliant detective; observant, logical, and confident; speaks in a precise and educated manner

Dr. Watson: Holmes's loyal friend and assistant; intelligent but often amazed by Holmes's deductions; speaks respectfully

Mr. Soames: A university tutor; nervous and worried about the scandal; speaks in an educated but anxious way

Bannister: An elderly servant; loyal and honest; speaks respectfully but becomes nervous when questioned; has worked at the college for many years

Gilchrist: A tall, athletic student; honest at heart despite his momentary weakness; speaks with shame and regret when caught

Scene 1: The Problem

Narrator: The year is 1895, and we find ourselves in one of England's greatest university towns. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson are visiting for research purposes. Late one afternoon, they receive an urgent visitor at their lodgings - Mr. Soames, a tutor from St. Luke's College. He bursts in, clearly distressed.

Mr. Soames: (speaking rapidly and anxiously) Mr. Holmes, thank heaven you are in town! We have had a most distressing incident at the college.

Holmes: (calmly) I am very busy with my research, Mr. Soames. Perhaps the local police—

Mr. Soames: (interrupting) No, no, impossible! This is a matter of utmost discretion. Tomorrow is the examination for the Fortescue Scholarship - a very valuable prize indeed.

Watson: And something has gone wrong with the examination?

Mr. Soames: Precisely, Dr. Watson. I am one of the examiners. This afternoon, I was reviewing the Greek translation paper. I left the proof sheets on my desk for just over an hour while I took tea with a colleague.

Holmes: (with increased interest) And when you returned?

Mr. Soames: The papers had been disturbed! One was on the floor, another by the window, and the third where I had left it. Someone had been copying them!

Holmes: Tell me about access to your rooms.

Mr. Soames: My servant Bannister left his key in the door by accident. And there are three students who live on the staircase above - all candidates for the scholarship.

Holmes: Describe these students, if you would.

Mr. Soames: First, there's Gilchrist - a fine scholar and athlete. His father was Sir Jabez Gilchrist, who lost his fortune on horse racing. The boy is poor now but hardworking. Then there's Daulat Ras, an Indian student - very quiet and methodical. Finally, Miles McLaren - brilliant when he chooses to work, but rather wild. He was nearly expelled last year over a gambling scandal.

Scene 2: The Investigation

Narrator: Holmes and Watson accompany Mr. Soames to his college rooms to examine the scene. The detective moves about the room carefully, noting every detail.

Holmes: (examining the table) Most interesting. Watson, do you see these pencil shavings? And this cut in the leather table top?

Watson: Yes, and what's this strange black substance?

Holmes: (picking up a small black pellet) Clay, Watson. Clay with traces of sawdust. Most illuminating!

Narrator: They call in Bannister, the elderly servant, for questioning.

Bannister: (trembling slightly) I only came in to ask about tea, sir. When I saw Mr. Soames wasn't here, I left at once.

Holmes: Yet you sat in that particular chair by the window before leaving. Why that chair, Bannister?

Bannister: (growing more nervous) I... I felt faint, sir. The shock of the papers being disturbed...

Holmes: (thoughtfully) Indeed. And you're certain you saw nothing else?

Bannister: (firmly but anxiously) Nothing at all, sir. I would never betray Mr. Soames's trust.

Scene 3: The Resolution

Narrator: The next morning, Holmes gathers everyone in Mr. Soames's room. The detective appears confident, having solved the mystery.

Holmes: Mr. Gilchrist, would you step forward?

Gilchrist: (surprised) You... you know?

Holmes: Yes. Shall I explain? Your jumping shoes from the athletic grounds left traces of black clay - the same clay found here and in Mr. Soames's bedroom. Being tall, you saw the papers through the window. When Mr. Soames returned unexpectedly, you hid in his bedroom, leaving your gloves behind.

Gilchrist: (with emotion) Yes, sir. It was a moment of weakness. But I have written this letter. (takes out letter) I withdraw from the examination. I've accepted a position in the Rhodesian Police and will leave England immediately.

Bannister: (stepping forward) Sir, I must speak. I served Mr. Gilchrist's father when their family had money. When I saw his gloves, I knew he must have been in the room. I protected him, yes, but I also made him see that he must make things right.

Holmes: (kindly) You fell, Mr. Gilchrist, but you have chosen to rise again. That shows true character.

Mr. Soames: (relieved) Thank you, Mr. Holmes. You have solved our problem with both wisdom and discretion.

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