

A Man Who Never Lived Can Never Die

By Laura Sook Duncombe

Some people like to see the world as a very simple place. Black or white, alive or dead, real or imaginary...opposites like these are proof to some people that the world we live in is full of easy answers. But other people believe in shades of gray between black and white. They know that ordinary things can hide extraordinary secrets, and that there is magic lurking around corners for those who know where to look. Sherlock Holmes is a part of those second group of people—the shades of gray people. He is a mystery: he was never alive, but his life is known to almost everyone. He is not real, but he lives in the hearts of so many people. He was an ordinary man with an extraordinary mind, and that mind led him on many amazing adventures. If you are reading this, you are about to enter his world.

In 1887, the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published. Ever since then, people have adored the great detective and his doctor. Sherlock Holmes is a detective who lives at 221B Baker Street in London with his best friend, Doctor John Watson. People who need help come visit them, and Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson work together to solve their mysteries. Sherlock Holmes notices everything! He can tell just by looking at the mud on your shoes or the marks on your hand where you live or what kind of job you have. There is no limit to what his sharp mind can figure out. But he is so smart about little details that sometimes he forgets big things, like how the solar system works. Dr. Watson helps him with the big things. Dr. Watson is also loyal and brave, and he and Sherlock Holmes make a perfect team. Their friendship is so famous that it has survived for over a hundred years.

There are sixty stories written about Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle. Most of these stories are written from the point of view of Dr. Watson, who explains the adventures. In the “Sherlockian” world (a word used for people who love Sherlock Holmes) people, kids and grownups, play a “Great Game.” We pretend that Sherlock Holmes was real, and Arthur Conan Doyle was their literary agent (a person who helps stories get published). We pretend that all the stories are true, and that Sherlock Holmes is alive and well today, retired in Sussex and keeping bees. We know it’s not real, but it is fun to pretend and keep the memory of the world’s greatest detective alive. Now that you are a Sherlockian, you can play the “Great Game” too!

Sherlockians don’t just read about Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, they like to talk about them, too. All around the world, there are “scion societies” (Sherlockian clubs) that love to get together and discuss the stories, take quizzes, and present new scholarship about the great detective. By joining the Junior Sherlockians, you are part of your very own scion society. Sherlockians in scion societies write very smart papers to explain things in the stories, like why Dr. Watson’s war wound is sometimes in his leg and sometimes in his shoulder, or what Sherlock Holmes did during “the Great

Hiatus”—the three years when he was missing and presumed dead. There is a lot to think about and explore in the stories, and Sherlockians love to think and explore.

The world of Sherlock Holmes is a magical one, full of secrets, danger, adventure, and mystery, where it is always the year 1895. Sherlockians spend many happy hours escaping to this world: reading, discussing, exploring, and writing about Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson. The keys to this world are in your hand—the stories of Sherlock Holmes. You can go there whenever you like. This world belongs to you, as it has belonged to every Sherlockian before you and will belong to every Sherlockian after you. You are a part of a proud group of people who want to keep the memory of “the Master” (a nickname for Sherlock Holmes) evergreen. Welcome to this scion! Welcome to this world!