

6B: Mysteries & Investigations

In this unit, students read like an investigator as they study the world of scientific and investigative sleuthing. *The Secret of the Yellow Death: A True Story of Medical Sleuthing* by Suzanne Jurmain and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories take place in the late 19th century, when medical diagnostics and criminal investigations were still evolving into scientific fields.

As students read *The Secret of the Yellow Death*, the lessons challenge students to grapple with clues, evidence, and scientific data to work alongside Dr. Walter Reed and his team of scientific investigators to collaborate with their Cuban counterparts and seek the truth about yellow fever. Dr. Reed became famous for the work his team did to uncover the method by which the deadly yellow fever is transmitted. Students explore the team's approaches to experiments and working with human subjects, and consider how current scientists and health workers approach issues of public health. Students then continue to trace evidence as they move on to closely read two Sherlock Holmes detective stories, breaking down Holmes's observations of a crime scene to understand how the detective breaks unsolvable mysteries wide open. At the end of the unit, students write an essay explaining which character trait is most useful to problem-solving investigators.

NOTE: Yellow fever is a severe illness. While there is a very effective vaccination for this disease, there were large and devastating epidemics of yellow fever in American history. Especially given the Covid-19 pandemic, some students may find the descriptions of yellow fever and the past outbreaks of the illness upsetting. Provide opportunities for students to express their feelings and talk about current events. It may be helpful to point out that the work of medical and scientific communities is focused on finding solutions, including preventative measures and medical interventions.

Core texts your student will read:

- *The Secret of the Yellow Death: A True Story of Medical Sleuthing* by Suzanne Jurmain
- Excerpt from *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- Letter from Mabel H. Lazear to Dr. James Carroll
- "Yellow Fever Circles Brazil's Huge Cities" by Shasta Darlington and Donald G. McNeil Jr.
- The Hippocratic Oath
- "The Speckled Band" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
- "The Red-Headed League" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

What my student will do/learn:

- Students read and discuss the methods and discoveries of a team of scientists as they investigate the theories about yellow fever and its transmission in *The Secret of the Yellow Death*.
- Students use a specially-designed Evidence app to understand and practice how to analyze and evaluate evidence presented in the texts they read.

- Students investigate alongside Sherlock Holmes as he unlocks mysteries in “The Speckled Band” and “The Red-Headed League.” Using the detective apps Scene of the Crime and Caught Red-Handed, students identify and evaluate clues, while piecing together the truth.
- Students continue to use key classroom routines, including the sharing routine, during which classmates respond to shared writing by noting one effective way the writer used details or evidence.
- Students continue to write in response to prompts 2–3 times weekly, and practice analytic writing in response to text by developing a controlling idea or claim and providing support with details or evidence.
- Students write an end-of-unit essay responding to the following prompt: Based on the texts you have read, what stands out to you as one important characteristic to have as a problem solver or investigator? Include two examples of individuals demonstrating this characteristic in your response.

Here are some conversation starters that you can use during this unit to promote discussion and encourage continued learning with your student.

1. What was surprising about the process that doctors and scientists took to determine the cause of yellow fever? Can you think of people today using similar processes to solve problems?
2. In *The Secret of the Yellow Death*, scientists try to figure out what causes yellow fever in an effort to stop its spread. In the Holmes stories, Sherlock Holmes tries to figure out who committed a crime (and in some cases, what exactly that crime is). When you’re trying to figure something out, what steps do you usually take? Do any of your steps match those taken by investigators in this unit?
3. What stands out to you about Sherlock Holmes? Consider his personality, his relationship with Watson, and his investigative techniques.
4. Can you share a piece of writing with me in which you support an idea with evidence or details from the text? (Provide feedback to your student by finding something in their writing that you can respond to as a reader. For example, “When you use the detail about Dr. Carroll’s five children and explain how that means he ‘must be able to provide for them,’ it supports your idea that he would not have wanted to get sick with yellow fever.”)
5. What characteristic(s) do you notice that the scientists investigating yellow fever have in common with Sherlock Holmes?