

## Unit 6

# The Hell Hound

## *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

How effectively can you build tension in a narrative?

### Access strategies

Read out this extract from *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. You could have lots of pictures of foggy scenes on a PowerPoint loop as you speak:



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Every minute that white woolly plain which covered one-half of the moor was drifting closer and closer to the house. Already the first thin wisps of it were curling across the golden square of the lighted window. The farther wall of the orchard was already invisible, and the trees were standing out of a swirl of white vapour. As we watched it the fog-wreaths came crawling round both corners of the house and rolled slowly into one dense bank on which the upper floor and the roof floated like a strange ship upon a shadowy sea. Holmes struck his hand passionately upon the rock in front of us and stamped his feet in his impatience.

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Try a **javelin** approach: aim high, aim fast and be ambitious! I anticipate some very exciting lessons where pupils move straight into some inventive writing. Don't tell them the passage is from *The Hound of the Baskervilles*; instead, ask them to invent a creature which is about to appear on the moors. Their idea must fit the description and atmosphere of the extract, so their writing will also test their comprehension skills.

A brief **think, pair, share** can help to isolate promising ideas for discussion and unlikely ones to be dismissed – then let the pens flow!

In a **mini-plenary**, sift and sort the writing that best captures the setting and action. This should have engaged the imagination and attention ready for the full text which is from Chapter 14 of the book:

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I have said that over the great Grimpen Mire there hung a dense, white fog. It was drifting slowly in our direction and banked itself up like a wall on that side of us, low but thick and well defined. The moon shone on it, and it looked like a great shimmering ice-field. [...]

Every minute that white woolly plain which covered one-half of the moor was drifting closer and closer to the house. Already the first thin wisps of it were curling across the golden square of the lighted window. The farther wall of the orchard was already invisible, and the trees were standing out of a swirl of white vapour. As we watched it the fog-wreaths came crawling round both corners of the house and rolled slowly into one dense bank on which the upper floor and the roof floated like a strange ship upon a shadowy sea. Holmes struck his hand

Resource 17



Original Hound of the Baskervilles' text from: Conan Doyle, Arthur (1999 [1901]). 'The Hound of the Baskervilles', in *The Hound of the Baskervilles and The Valley of Fear*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions.

passionately upon the rock in front of us and stamped his feet in his impatience. [...]

There was a thin, crisp, continuous patter from somewhere in the heart of that crawling bank. The cloud was within fifty yards of where we lay, and we glared at it, all three, uncertain what horror was about to break from the heart of it. I was at Holmes's elbow, and I glanced for an instant at his face. It was pale and exultant, his eyes shining brightly in the moonlight. But suddenly they started forward in a rigid, fixed stare, and his lips parted in amazement. At the same instant Lestrade gave a yell of terror and threw himself face downward upon the ground. I sprang to my feet, my inert hand grasping my pistol,

Resource 18



Original Hound of the Baskervilles' text from: Conan Doyle, Arthur (1999 [1901]). 'The Hound of the Baskervilles', in *The Hound of the Baskervilles and The Valley of Fear*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions.

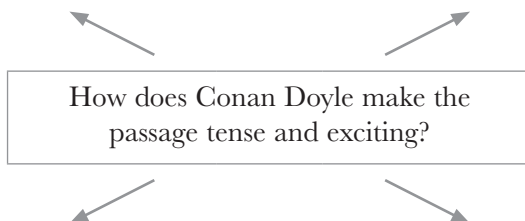
my mind paralysed by the dreadful shape which had sprung out upon us from the shadows of the fog. A hound it was, an enormous coal-black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. Never in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish, be conceived than that dark form and savage face which broke upon us out of the wall of fog.

With long bounds the huge black creature was leaping down the track, following hard upon the footsteps of our friend. So paralysed were we by the apparition that we allowed him to pass before we had recovered our nerve.

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## Reading journeys

Ask your pupils to explore the question below and start sketching out what can be learnt from Conan Doyle's technique. They can invent questions and make comments in the white spaces and link this with highlightings or queries made about the text itself. **Text ownership** is vital to self-confidence. How many times, like me, have you said to a pupil, 'You can't find the answer by looking at the ceiling!' These kinds of reading journeys, exploring challenging texts, should help to build the habit of absorption in language and encourage active work towards deeper understanding.



Support questions can be introduced as appropriate:

- 🐾 How do we find out about Holmes's mood?
- 🐾 What differences are there between Holmes's state of mind and the narrator's?
- 🐾 How is the hound described?
- 🐾 How do the fog and cloud contribute to the tension?
- 🐾 Explain and explore the importance of 'fog-wreaths', 'exultant', 'inert hand' and 'flickering flame'.

Central to the 'Opening Doors' strategy is that more pupils have the chance to answer harder questions once they have engaged with the texts, so I have suggested opportunities for complex conceptual thinking first with easier questions seen as support. You may wish to include further access questions to build confidence, such as asking for a comment on how adjectives like 'savage' and 'dark' tell us more.

This is also where spelling, punctuation and grammar can be taught in context. While your pupils are in an enquiring frame of mind, you can point out the double 'z' of 'muzzle', the connective phrase 'at the same instant' or the commanding tone of the sentence beginning

‘Never in the delirious dream’. It makes a lot more sense than teaching using discrete exercises because pupils can see how decisions about spelling, punctuation and grammar affect meaning.

Professor Debra Myhill has researched how grammar can be taught in context. Her report, ‘Words with Ways: How Grammar Supports Writing’ (2015), will be a helpful addition to your thinking. In it she describes how grammar can be made explicit ‘at a point in the teaching sequence which is relevant to the focus of learning’.

Look for some of the following points from your pupils focusing particularly on evidence provided on language effect.

### **Excellent responses will:**

- 🐾 Include examples of the way the fog adds a haunting sense of the unseen (e.g. the alliteration of ‘white woolly plain’).
- 🐾 Explain how the level of detail adds to the tension (e.g. ‘fog-wreaths came crawling round both corners’).
- 🐾 Stress how the uncertainty builds via characters and setting.
- 🐾 Describe how Holmes is shown as being excited and impatient.
- 🐾 Explain how the narrator’s fear translates itself to the reader with a series of clauses focusing directly on the ferocious hound.

There is likely to be a vital learning session where the pupils report back progress on their **white space thinking** exercise. At this point, you can introduce the deeper knowledge needed on areas where even the most able may struggle. However, the support questions and access strategies should have helped the comprehension of those of lower ability too.

*Bob says ...*

*In all my work with schools on 'Opening Doors', I have been encouraged by the feedback that lower ability pupils love the creative opportunities afforded by the extracts. You should find that they respond well to ambitious questions as long as the access strategies have succeeded. Get them hooked with the excitement: the mist, the moors, the hound and Holmes himself!*

## Beyond the limit

Try comparing *The Hound of the Baskervilles* with other famous literary canines:

🐾 *The Incredible Journey* by Sheila Burnford

🐾 *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (an internet image search will reveal lots of famous illustrations of Bill Sikes's loyal bull terrier, Bull's Eye, who is brutally treated by Sikes)

🐾 *That Spot* by Jack London (see Unit 3)

🐾 *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* by Jack London

🐾 *The Hundred and One Dalmatians* by Dodie Smith

Ask your pupils to deepen their study by sketching out the very different ways these authors have used dogs to create tension or even to steer the whole story.

Alternatively, some pupils might like to explore the kind of traditional atmosphere of adventure and mystery they have tasted in this story. In

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which case, try dipping into these texts by pioneers of tales about detectives, spies, chases and foreign intrigues:

🐾 *The Thirty-Nine Steps* by John Buchan

🐾 Detective stories featuring Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple by Agatha Christie

🐾 *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins

🐾 *The Lost World* and the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

🐾 *Rogue Male* by Geoffrey Household

🐾 *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* by Jules Verne (see Unit 10 of *Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose*)

A full version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2852/2852-h/2852-h.htm>.

## Wings to fly

Ask your pupils to write down three important things they have learnt so far about creating tension. I wonder if they will include:

🐾 Building a setting which infers uncertainties.

🐾 Developing character and setting together.

🐾 Deciding on how much to imply and how much to tell.

🐾 Delivering a few sustained sentences of either revelation, horror or surprise to release the tension.



Having learnt from Conan Doyle's example, it's time for the children to put *The Hound of the Baskervilles* into the context of other **link reading** about tension and plan something original to write.

*Bob says ...*

*Of course, great writers play with our expectations, break the rules and take risks, so there are no hard and fast rules or creativity would become conformity!*

Ask the pupils to try one of these ideas:

- ♥ Create your own hell hound but in a different setting.
- ♥ Build tension for a different event set on Grimpen Mire.
- ♥ Use 'fog-wreaths' as the centre of your narrative which will provoke uncertainty in the reader.
- ♥ Continue the passage to reveal more about the hell hound.
- ♥ The path across the mire or bog will be covered by fog in thirty minutes. Three people are still out there. What happens next?

Your pupils might like to try a **mind link** where they relate something known with something out of their experience. Ask them to think of a moment of tension which could be centred around mounting uncertainty. If they cannot come up with an example, try the list below:

- ♥ Are you going to be late for a train?
- ♥ Can the team you support still win the game with five minutes left?
- ♥ Your mobile phone does not work and your parents are expecting you to call them ...

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Everyone has experienced tension so it is a relatable feeling to jump-start the creativity! A debate in class or a role play can now support the writing as the children's imagination goes into more uncharted territory. In *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot says: 'Here undoubtedly lies the chief poetic energy – in the force of the imagination that pierces or exalts the solid fact.'

Finally, enjoy the imaginative power and tension building of Owen's writing:

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### **The Daunting Footsteps**

As the thin coils of fog rolled toward me, I could make out a faint sound of footsteps coming closer when suddenly they stopped. Silence. The wind howled along the horizon. I stepped back; I could barely see the church now. It was engulfed by the great wall of fog. The willow a few feet in front of me stood crooked with branches spreading in every way possible. I could make out the crisp, thin footsteps. Only a few metres in front of me, I could make out a dark shape. It looked like it was coming closer and closer ...

*Owen Lee, Fort Hill Community School (Year 7)*

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