

Discussion Questions

- 1 Sherlock Holmes is one of the few fictional characters so internationally famous that even before readers encounter the Holmes stories, they are already familiar with the great detective. After reading *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and/or watching the film, how would you answer the question, “Who is Holmes?” What scenes or details in *The House of the Baskervilles* do you think illustrate his character especially well? To what extent do you think the character described in the story lives up to his myth?
- 2 *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is marked by the constant juxtaposition of the rational and scientific with the irrational and supernatural. How can you see this tension in the novel? In the film? Which of the two forces—science or the supernatural—triumphs at the end? Why might this tension have been especially riveting for a Victorian audience?
- 3 The moors in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* are so central to the plot that they are almost function as another character in the story. If you were to describe them the way you would describe a human character, what would you say about them? Which person in the story do they most resemble and why?
- 4 Historians of the detective novel recognize the pairing of the brilliant Holmes with a very ordinary partner—Watson—as one of the Arthur Conan Doyle’s key contributions to the genre. Why do you think their pairing works so well? How would *The Hound of the Baskervilles* be different if Watson were taken out of the tale? Holmes remarks in another novel that Watson “sees but does not observe.” How does that make him a useful narrator for a detective story?
- 5 In a well-crafted detective story, nothing is wasted; each scene adds suspense and clues to the hunt for “whodunnit.” How tightly written is *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in this sense? What particular clues, details, descriptions, or lines of dialogue work particularly well to build suspense? What is the climactic scene and why?
- 6 Though the film is generally faithful to the novel, the opening scenes of the two are quite different. Which do you find more effective? Why do you think the director of the film chose to depart from the novel in this way?
- 7 A great detective needs a worthy nemesis. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Stapleton plays this role, though in the film he is even more diabolical than in Conan Doyle’s original depiction. When did you begin to suspect Stapleton? What clues gave him away? In what ways are Holmes and Stapleton similar? How does this heighten their conflict?

- 8 The essential premise of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is classic, a storyline that can be found in countless other works of fiction: *Someone new comes to stay in an isolated place about which legends and mysteries are associated. This person's life and/or sanity is threatened by increasingly frightening events until a perpetrator is caught.* List books, films, television shows, legends, myths, ghost stories, or other stories that share this same basic setup. Why do you think it is such an enduring premise for a story?
- 9 Why are we so fascinated with crime—especially murder? Why are crime and detective novels, films, and television shows so popular? Do you think murder mysteries or detective fiction are different from “serious literature”? If so, why?

The Hound of the Baskervilles, by Arthur Conan Doyle, was first published in 1902. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/hound/index.html>. For *The Hound of the Baskervilles Teacher's Guide*, go to <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/hound/tguide.html>. You may also want to check out the Web site for the MASTERPIECE film *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Silk Stocking* at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/silkstocking/index.html>. The MASTERPIECE series *Sherlock*, a new interpretation set in modern-day London, offers additional insights at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/sherlock/index.html>.

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