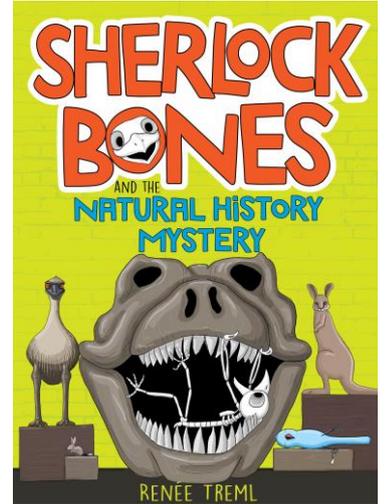


Sherlock Bones and the Natural History Mystery

By Renée Trembl



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ISBN 9781760523954
Paperback
Recommended for
6-9-year-olds

Summary

When the world's most valuable gemstone vanishes without a trace, a delightfully weird museum specimen and his stuffed parrot companion must find the culprit and recover the diamond, or their beloved museum will close forever.

Sherlock Bones and the Natural History Mystery is a hilariously funny, graphic mystery-adventure, just right for 6-to-9-year-olds. Think Sherlock Holmes meets Calvin & Hobbes (with maybe just a touch of the Tim Burton)

The book's low word count makes it accessible for beginner readers, but it's sophisticated and funny enough to hold the attention of slightly older kids too.

Use in the curriculum

In the classroom, apart from the hilarious enjoyment of the book in private reading time, *Sherlock Bones and the Natural History Mystery* is useful for discussions of genre.

graphic storytelling: use of frames; use of visual tropes; use of varied font sizes and strength

comic writing/illustrating: subversion of some of the tropes of detective fiction; use of the 'fallible hero' who addresses us in the first person but we doubt his veracity or ability; the 'running gag' of the stuffed parrot and Sherlock's 'conversation' with him; visual gags (pp. 14 & 15 – huge close-up and the words 'Whoa. That's close enough! Ever heard of personal space?')

detective fiction: in particular, the Sherlock Holmes stories. Chart the progress of the mystery solving, with set backs and final solution. Was it possible to guess the solution?

Themes

mystery, natural history, humour

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Discussion questions

Before reading exercise

Before showing the class a copy of *Sherlock Bones and the Natural History Mystery* ask students if they have ever visited a museum, what kind of museum it was and what sort of exhibits were on display. Explain that in some museum's animals that were once living can be exhibited – either as skeletons or when they are stuffed. Perhaps show some images of examples.

Now show the book's cover and ask students the following questions:

- Is there anything funny about the name Sherlock Bones?
- Which character in the image might be Sherlock and what makes you think this?
- Look closely at the image and name three exhibits you might expect to find in a natural history museum.
- Will the book be funny? What elements on the cover (think colour, font, images) set the mood for you to expect this of the book?

Comprehension Questions

Opening chapter

- Sherlock Bones is the skeleton of what living creature? (p. 9)
- In which room in the museum does Sherlock live? (pp. 16-17)
- Name Sherlock's trusty partner and describe him? (p. 23)
- What is the name of the animal that falls on top of Sherlock at the end of the chapter? (pp. 32-33)

Chapter 1

- Why do you think the security guard agrees to keep looking for Nelle's toy after the museum is evacuated? [Hint: her grandfather works in the museum.] (p. 38-39)
- What has been stolen from the museum? (p. 43)
- Why is Sherlock Bones so upset about the possibility of the museum being shut-down? (pp. 50-51)

Chapter 2

- Why does Grace think she would be a better friend than Watts? (p. 57)
- What sort of animal terrifies Grace? (p. 69)
- How does Sherlock Bones get Watts to fly (pp. 74-75) and how successful are they? (pp. 78-79)

Chapter 3

- Why might Grace have stolen the diamond? (p. 84)
- What makes Sherlock Bones think the guard might be the thief? (pp. 89-95)

Chapter 4

- Why does Sherlock Bones call the giant dinosaur display 'cousin'? (pp. 104-105)
- In your own words explain what Sherlock Bones does on page 114.
- How does Sherlock Bones lift Watts up to the desk? (p. 118)

Chapter 4

- Why does Sherlock Bones call the giant dinosaur display 'cousin'? (pp. 104-105)
- In your own words explain what Sherlock Bones does on page 114.
- How does Sherlock Bones lift Watts up to the desk? (p. 118)

Discussion and activities

1. Divide the class into groups of two and ask one student in each group to imagine they are Sherlock Bones describing Watts. Now ask the other student in each group to describe Watts as they think he really is.
In a whole class discussion list the differences between these two descriptions.
2. Turn to Chapter 10, 'Bird Brain', and discuss how words in books tell us the story but that the way words are written – such as their size, font, use of caps – also tell us about the story.
Give an example by turning to page 212 and looking at the special way the words 'Hey Lady, you forgot your dinosaur!' are shown.
[Hint: bigger, thicker words suggest that Sherlock Bones is shouting.] Ask students to find other examples where this happens in this chapter.
3. Ask students in their own words to explain who the real thief was, three things they stole other than the blue diamond, what each of these things have in common and why the thief wanted to collect them.

Research

Visit the Australian Museum's website at <https://australianmuseum.net.au/> and search for information on the tawny frogmouth (Sherlock Bones). Ask students to find out five interesting facts about these creatures, including what they look like, where they live and what they eat.

The author

Renée Tremblé is the author and illustrator of several successful picture books for very young readers, including: *Once I Heard a Little Wombat*, *Ten Little Owls* and *Wombat Big, Puggle Small*. She also has a degree in environmental science and has a passionate love of natural history.

About creating *Sherlock Bones*, Renée says:

'*Sherlock Bones and the Natural History Mystery* was inspired by an amazing exhibit of tawny frogmouth skeletons in the Queensland Museum. The display is set in a small glass case that houses several frogmouth skeletons. They are perched on a branch in various poses. They have the most marvellous expressions and I spent many hours illustrating them creating all sorts of mischief in the museum at night.

'It wasn't until I visited the Melbourne Museum that I finally found the culprit and setting for my mystery. I won't spoil the ending, but if you visit the Forest Gallery you might just get a glimpse of him.

'My interest and love for museums and mysteries was kindled by one of my favourite childhood books, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by EL Konigsburg. I love visiting museums and hope someday my son will want to do a museum sleep-over so I, too, can spend the night in a museum. I also studied and taught biology at University, so I am always looking for fun true facts that I can use in my stories.'

