
Study Guide

Sherlock Holmes



Feature movies are a medium, an art and a business. Each of these elements plays a role. As a medium, movies represent ideas through the codes and conventions of sound and moving image. As art, they make personal and cultural statements to their audiences. As businesses, they create work for their creators and profits for their investors.

This guide, which extends the ideas presented in the *Sherlock Holmes* episode of *Beyond the Screen*, may be used by teachers as they support their students, by parents who want to discuss the movie with their children, or by serious viewers who want to think beyond the screen.

Plot Synopsis: Dr. Watson is getting married. More importantly, he is moving from 221b Baker Street and breaking up his crime-fighting partnership with *Sherlock Holmes*, who is bereft. When Lord Blackwell, whom they apprehended and Watson pronounced dead after they saw him executed, rises from the grave and wreaks havoc on London, they must use all their intelligences and energies to stop him.

A. Editing

Flashbacks, flash forwards, slow motion, fast motion and jump cuts occur in *Sherlock Holmes*, and give the movie a special feeling.

Flashbacks occur when an editor inserts moments of past events, which might occur as a character describes or remembers them. These events might have occurred prior to the beginning of the movie, and give viewers useful background information, or they might re-present events from earlier in the movie. In *Sherlock Holmes*, most of the flashbacks involve representing events that viewers have already seen, sometimes from Holmes' point of view, and sometime from the points of view of other characters.

Flash-forwards occur when an editor inserts moments of events that are yet to occur so that they either foretell future events or visualize a character's anticipation of events. Flash-forwards occur several times in *Sherlock Holmes*, often when Holmes thinks through an action before executing it. This happens twice when he is fighting.

Slow motion occurs when frames are shown more slowly than they were photographed, so that time seems to be stretched, or events seem to occur very slowly compared to their normal speed. This also happens when Holmes is fighting.

Fast motion occurs when events are shown more quickly than they were photographed, so that time seems compressed, or events occur very quickly compared to their normal speed. One scene of fast motion occurred when Holmes got into disguise before following Irene to Moriarity's carriage.

Jump cuts occur when an editor omits action that shows continuous motion. This might occur if viewers see a character standing, then cut instantly to that character sitting in a chair, with the motion of the character sitting down removed, as though time has jumped forward. Jump cuts force viewers to pay special attention because they have to imagine the action that has been removed to maintain their sense of the movie.

When did you notice flashbacks, flash-forwards, slow motion, fast motion and jump cuts?

How did they help viewers understand the events in the story?

How did they add to the viewers' enjoyment of the story?

B. Cinematography

Sherlock Holmes uses a moving camera often. Sometimes the camera moves on a dolly or crane, and sometime it is hand-held.

When Holmes leaves Watson to break into Riordan's lab, the camera follows Watson as he walks away, then rushes into a close-up as he turns back to help Holmes.

What is the effect of the rapid dolly-in on Watson's face?

What might this shot be telling viewers?

When Lestrade enters the holding cell to fetch Holmes for his meeting with the heads of the Four Corners, there is a large crowd gathered around and obscuring Holmes. The hand-held camera follows Lestrade into the crowd.

What is the effect of this hand-held camera movement?

How might it make viewers feel that Holmes is in danger and needs immediate rescue?

What other examples of moving camera did you notice?

C. Production Design

Sherlock Holmes has a dark, underexposed look, with heavy browns and grays and very few reds and yellows. Many of the scenes occur at night, and the sun rarely shines during the day. The sets and streets are cluttered with props, and costumes have been layered and 'stressed,' or worn and washed so that they have strong textures and creases. There is smoke or dust in the air, and the walls and streets are heavily textured with bricks or cobbles.

How do these design elements help viewers feel the grittiness of 1890s London?

How does the strong musical soundtrack support the textured look of the sets?

Does the production design influence the viewer to think that Lord Blackwood's practical magic will succeed, or that Holmes will overcome evil?

D. Costume Design

Irene, Mary, Holmes, Watson and Blackwood are all costumed very purposefully.

Irene and Mary's costume designs set them apart from one another. One wears dominant monotones, the other muted textures.

How do they help viewers understand their personalities?

Watson's costumes are quite different from Holmes'. Watson's clothing is clean, coordinated and plain. Holmes' clothing is highly textured and contrasting.

How do their costume designs help viewers understand the differences in their personalities?

How do Irene and Holmes' costume designs, and Mary and Watson's costume designs, help viewers understand how their personalities match one another?

Lord Blackwood is the only character that dresses in leather.

How does his leather coat help viewers feel his evil?

E. Sound Editing

1. Transitions

Quick, low growls accompany many scene changes, and may be imperceptible to some viewers.

Do these transitions sound like the growls of a bear, a walrus, a lion, or might they be a combination of all of them?

What effect might these growls have on viewers?

2. Sound montages

A sound montage is a carefully edited collection of sounds that combine to create meaning and feelings.

- a) When Holmes is waiting in the Hotel Royale restaurant for Watson and his fiancé to arrive for dinner, we see him observing the people around him. We also hear a wider range of voices and sounds, which get louder and more frequent.

How does this sound montage help viewers understand and appreciate Holmes' powers of observation and deduction?

How does this montage help to set the stage for Holmes' analysis of Mary Morstan?

- b) When Holmes is depressed and morose from seeing Watson in the hospital and being unable to solve the case, he meditates and casts Blackwood's spell. The soundtrack presents a large selection of sounds and voices of past events in the case.

How might this sound montage help viewers understand Holmes' thoughts and actions?

F. Music

Sherlock Holmes uses music very purposefully. The soundtrack was composed by Hans Zimmer, who also composed the soundtracks for the recent *Beyond the Screen* movie *The Dark Knight* and *Scanning the Movies* movies *Matchstick Men* and *The Last Samurai*.

Zimmer used strings, woodwinds and drums, but rarely brass instruments for *Sherlock Holmes*.

1. Hans Zimmer uses stringed instruments often, sometimes plucked or struck (violins, harpsichords and banjos), and sometimes bowed (violins, cellos and basses).

What effects might plucked or struck strings have on viewers' responses to the action?

What effects might bowed stringed instruments have on viewers' responses?

Where were plucked strings used effectively?

Where were bowed strings used effectively?

2. The *Sherlock Holmes* soundtrack often uses a driving beat, similar to the rhythm of a steam engine, in many scenes.

When do you hear the use of a driving beat in the music?

How does the driving beat add to the mood and excitement of the scene?

3. When do you hear a Gaelic folk song? (During the bare-fisted boxing match.)

How does this folk song help viewers understand the cultural context of the scene?

4. When do you hear a gypsy violin?

How does this gypsy music provide an interesting and effective context for its scene?

5. The tango is a dance in which the dancers aggressively push each other back and forth, as though in a contest to see who can dominate. Tango music is used in the scene where Sherlock and Irene are discussing the case and what they are going to do to solve it.

How might the tango music help viewers understand the relationship between Holmes and Irene?

How might it add humour to the scene?

G. Holmes Remixed

Sherlock Holmes is preceded by books, movies and television series, each of which presented their own representations of the famous detective. One of the best-known Holmes is Basil Rathbone, who played the sleuth in twelve movies as calm, analytical and deliberate. Robert Downey Jr. presents a remixed Holmes, one who is still brilliantly observant and deductive, but who is also very physical and emotional. His Holmes reveals love for a woman (Irene Adler) and a man (his affection for Watson). He also admits to worries, when he falters with self-doubt after the explosion at the slaughterhouse. He is a very physical Holmes, fighting both for pleasure and to subdue villains. Part of Downey's physical representation of Holmes includes slapstick, e.g., when he crashes through a roof and becomes trapped in a shed.

How might audiences respond to the remixed Holmes?

Will they accept his human frailties?

Will they enjoy the humour, or see it as a misrepresentation of the 19th century hero?

Might they accept this Holmes as one who is multi-dimensional and fits with other 21st century heroes, e.g., Harry Potter, Walter Kowalski in *Gran Torino* or Bruce Wayne in *The Dark Knight*?

H. Sequel (Spoiler Alert!)

At the end of *Sherlock Holmes* Watson has married and moved to separate quarters. Irene Adler has reluctantly returned to the employ of Professor Moriarty, who has stolen the remote-control from the cyanide generator. Irene has split with her husband, a wealthy prince, and has taken a valuable jewel. Holmes has stolen the jewel and given it to Mary, Watson's new wife. When he realizes that Professor Moriarty will likely use the remote-control for evil purposes, *Sherlock Holmes*' shouts jubilantly, "Case re-opened!"

These events set up opportunities for a sequel. The challenges for the sequel screenwriters will be to get Holmes and Watson back together so that they can solve the case. That means that they will have to find a reason for Watson to spend time apart from Mary. The writers will also have to use Irene Adler as a villain, a helper, or both. They might bring the wealthy prince into the story to recoup the loss of his ring, and maybe to recoup Irene. That might put Irene

and Mary's lives at risk. Professor Moriarty's identity may or may not be revealed. Lestrade and Clark will likely play roles in the new story.

What kinds of evil schemes might include the use of a remote-control in 1890s London?

How might Watson re-team with Holmes?

How might Irene Adler both commit crimes and help solve the case?

How might Mary be put in harm's way because she possesses Irene's jewel?

What might be Holmes' response to his gift of the stolen ring placing Mary and Watson in harm's way?

How might the story involve Lestrade and Clark?

What title might be used, since *Sherlock Holmes* has already been used?

For more information on *Sherlock Holmes*, visit <http://sherlock-holmes-movie.warnerbros.com/> and www.imdb.com

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