

The Second Stain

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Chapter 2

Author: Daniel Barber

Level: Intermediate

Age: Young adults / Adults

Time: 45 minutes (60 with optional activity)

Aims: In this lesson, students will:

1. listen to identify and correct errors in statements;
2. check their understanding and study some words key to understanding the story;
3. listen for gist to check predictions;
4. practise the first conditional;
5. conduct an interview role-play with Lord Bellinger.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (the beginning of Chapter 2) and Track 2 (the rest of Chapter 2) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the interviewer's questions per pair of students; one copy of the full transcript per student

Summary: Sherlock Holmes and his assistant, Doctor Watson, are visited by two very important gentlemen: the Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe, Mr Trelawney Hope. They want Holmes's help in an extremely delicate matter. Hope has lost a document, the existence of which, if made public, could threaten the peace and stability of Britain. In Chapter 2, Holmes persuades Lord Bellinger to disclose the contents of the missing letter, a secret of the most sensitive nature. There is no doubting the fact: should the letter become public, Britain will undoubtedly be at war and thousands of men will die.

Listening 1

Aim: to understand how Holmes persuades the prime minister to tell him about the letter

1. Tell the class that Chapter 2 continues the conversation started in Chapter 1. Ask the class to recap on Chapter 1. They should:

- name the people in the room;
- explain the problem that the government ministers are facing;
- provide any details about the disappearance of the letter;
- say what the ministers are hoping Holmes will be able to do.

Ask them to predict what the characters will talk about next.

2. Hand out the worksheet. Ask them to look at Listening activity 1. Explain that the statements are about the conversation but that they are all incorrect. Put the students into pairs and get them to guess what might be wrong with each of the statements. You could do the first with the class as a whole before they start:

Perhaps it isn't Holmes who wants to know what the letter looks like; perhaps he guesses what it looks like; perhaps he doesn't care what it looks like; or perhaps he wants to know something different.

Ask them to guess which of the theories you have mentioned is most likely. Then, give them a couple of minutes to discuss the possibilities for the other statements.

3. Tell the class that they will now listen to the start of the chapter. They should correct

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the statements as they listen. Play Track 1. When it has stopped, allow a minute for them to complete their corrections, since they may not have had enough time while listening. Then, let them compare their corrections with their partners.

4. Ask individuals to share their corrected sentences with the rest of the class.

Key: 1. Holmes wants to know *what the letter looks like* **what is in the letter / what the letter says / the letter's contents**.; 2. The envelope is **red blue** and is addressed to Mr Hope.; 3. Lord Bellinger *is happy to* **refuses to / says he cannot** tell Holmes everything he can about the letter.; 4. Holmes stands up *because he wants to start working on the case immediately* **to signal that the conversation is finished and he cannot help the men**.; 5. Lord Bellinger *refuses* **agrees** to tell Holmes what he wants to know.

Vocabulary

Aim: to pre-teach some important vocabulary before listening

1. Explain that they are going to study some words that are used in the rest of the chapter. Show them the Vocabulary activity on the worksheet and point to the eight words in bold in the eight sentences. Have them work in pairs to match the words to the definitions below.

2. When they have finished, conduct whole-class feedback on the answers.

Key: 1. *g*; 2. *f*; 3. *a*; 4. *e*; 5. *h*; 6. *d*; 7. *b*; 8. *c*

Listening 2.1

Aims: to recap the class's theories about the contents of the letter and its importance; to listen for gist to check earlier predictions

1. Remind the class of their predictions as to the contents of the letter at the end of the previous lesson. Ask representatives of

each of the groups in that lesson to outline their theories to the class again. Write brief one-sentence summaries on the board of all the theories presented by the class and label them with the names of the students who thought of them.

2. Explain that they are now going to hear about the letter's contents. They should listen to see if any of their theories were close and which was closest. Play Track 2.

3. Allow them time to discuss their answers in pairs or small groups. Then, invite people to suggest which of the theories was closest to the truth and why. You may also invite people to say what they think of this plot and whether they find it a plausible story or not.

Listening 2.2

Aim: to listen for the chronological order of events

1. Tell the class they are going to listen to the recording again. This time, they need to complete the notes in Listening 2 on the worksheet. Explain that, since there are a lot of notes to take, it is a good idea to write in pencil any answers that they think they already know from the first listening. Give them a minute or two for this.

2. Play Track 2 again. When it has finished, let the students compare answers. Hand out a copy of the transcript to each student so that they can find their answers. When they have done this, ask whether anyone has any questions or doubts.

Key: 1. *Britain's policy*; 2. *angry (and worried)*; 3. *his own ministers*; 4. *a good idea*; 5. *it never existed*; 6. *the (foreign) ruler*; 7. *(very) angry; war*; 8. *career*; 9. *in Hope's house(hold)*; 10. *a(n) (international) spy*; 11. *too late*

Language (optional)

Aims: to practise the first conditional and extend awareness of the structure to include shall; to contrast use of if for

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conditional sentences with its use as a synonym of whether

1. Tell the class to look at the language activity on the worksheet. Ask them to work in pairs to answer questions 1 to 4 about the four sentences. When they have done this, go through the answers.

Key: 1. *a, b, d*; 2. *sentence c; whether*; 3. *starts with it – b; end with it – a and d*; 4. *shall*

You may want to point out that the use of *shall* in statements was more typical in the past and is now considered formal. On the other hand, its use in questions still represents normal, everyday usage and is not considered formal, at least in British English – for example, *Shall we go now?* and *Shall I give you the answers?*

You may want to further explore other alternatives to *will* in conditional sentences. For example, you could write on the board:

If it is sunny tomorrow, we will go for a picnic.

Invite suggestions for replacements for *will* in the sentence. Possibilities include *can, shall, must, might, may, could* and *should*.

2. Get students to expand the prompts in Language 2. You may want to do the first one as an example with the whole class, especially if you are not confident that they have mastered the first conditional. You might point out that, if the *if* clause is at the beginning of the sentence, a comma is necessary to separate the clauses. You might also need to show them that the auxiliary verb (*will* etc) introduces the consequence or possible result of what is described in the *if* clause. Let them work in pairs, if this helps, and monitor them closely as they work. Fast finishers could be asked to write a sixth sentence about the story.

3. When most have finished, invite students to write a sentence each on the board, to make feedback clear.

Key: 1. *If a spy already has the letter, I shall find it difficult to recover it.*; 2. *The newspapers will definitely write about the letter if they see it.*; 3. *If the British people read about the letter, they will want war.*; 4. *I shall send you a telegram if I find the letter.*; 5. *But, if I can't find it, you will have to prepare for war.*

Speaking

Aim: to engage in the theme of diplomacy and secrecy and explore the motivations of the main characters

1. Explain that the class is now going to do a role-play. Tell the class to imagine that it is ten years after the 'missing letter incident'. The foreign ruler at the centre of the incident has been dead for a few years and the two countries are now good friends. The secret has recently been made public and the newspapers are very interested in the story, although no one is angry. Explain that the role-play involves an interview between Lord Bellinger, who has recently retired from politics and a journalist from *The Times* newspaper of London. Put them in pairs and allocate each person their role: either Bellinger or the journalist. Hand out question cards to the journalists, who can show their partners the questions.

2. Give the pairs two minutes to read the questions and to choose eight of them to ask during the role-play. Make sure everyone knows who they are supposed to be. Ask the class to describe Lord Bellinger (he is very old now, retired, a serious British gentleman with a lot of authority) and to invent a name for the journalist. This may help them to get into character.

3. Tell them that they can start. You may want to put on some background music to encourage freer speaking and to evoke an atmosphere (classical music would be

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suitable). As they perform their interviews, visit the pairs, listening for good use of recently studied language, pronunciation and so on.

4. When they have finished, congratulate those who played Lord Bellinger for doing so with such authority and knowledge, and ask the interviewers whether their Lord Bellinger said anything interesting or anything that we did not already know from the story. Give any relevant feedback on the language used: grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation.

5. Finish the lesson by asking the class for their predictions. Will Holmes find the letter? Who do they think took it? How will Holmes get it back?

Follow-up tasks

- The students imagine that the letter has been made public. They write a newspaper article based on the subsequent events.
- The students find out about the British prime ministers at the end of the nineteenth century. They look for portraits of them, find out a little biographical information and some of the important events during the time they were in office.

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Listening 1

These statements are wrong. Discuss with a partner what might be incorrect.

1. Holmes wants to know what the letter looks like.
2. The envelope is red and is addressed to Mr Hope.
3. Lord Bellinger is happy to tell Holmes everything he can about the letter.
4. Holmes stands up because he wants to start working on the case immediately.
5. Lord Bellinger refuses to tell Holmes what he wants to know.

Listen to the beginning of Chapter 2 and check your answers.

Vocabulary

Look at sentences 1 to 8. Match the words in bold to their definitions a to h.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Before you make a decision, you must first consult the manager. | a. a claim that someone has done something illegal or wrong |
| 2. His plans for a quiet holiday were ruined when Karen decided to come, too. | b. a number of countries ruled by one person or government |
| 3. His worst accusation against me was that I stole his car. | c. people, teams or businesses that compete with one another |
| 4. I can't pretend that it never happened because it <i>did</i> happen! | d. a set of plans or actions agreed on by a government or other group |
| 5. If he wins the match, it will be to his advantage . | e. behave in a particular way because you want someone to believe that something is true when it is not |
| 6. The company has a tough policy on smoking. | f. destroyed or severely damaged |
| 7. The Roman Empire stretched from Britain to Egypt and lasted more than 600 years. | g. discuss something with someone or get their permission before you make a decision |
| 8. The two tennis players were fierce rivals . | h. make someone more likely to succeed |

Listening 2

Complete each note with one to three words.

1. The foreign ruler was worried about _____.
2. He was very _____ when he wrote the letter to the British government.
3. He did not consult _____.

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4. He now understands that the letter was not _____.
5. He wants the British government to pretend that _____.
6. Holmes writes the name of _____ on a piece of paper.
7. If the letter is made public, people in Britain will be _____ and Britain will soon be at _____.
8. If the letter is not found, Hope's _____ might be ruined.
9. Holmes thinks that someone _____ took the letter.
10. Holmes thinks that the person who stole the letter gave it to _____.
11. He thinks that it is probably _____ to recover the letter.

Listen to check.

Language 1

Read the sentences, which all contain the word *if*, and answer questions 1 to 4.

1. Which sentences below use *if* as part of a conditional structure about a possible future (first conditional)?
 - a. There will be great anger here against his country if the letter is made public.
 - b. If Britain is at war with one of the alliances, that will be greatly to the advantage of the other.
 - c. I will begin by finding out if any of them has left the country suddenly.
 - d. I shall waste your time and my own time if we talk any more.
2. Which sentence does not have a conditional meaning? What word could replace *if* here?
3. Which sentence starts with the *if* clause? Which end with the *if* clause?
4. *Will* is a common auxiliary verb in first conditional sentences. What other word sometimes replaces *will*, especially in sentences with a first person subject (*I* or *we*)?

Language 2

Complete these sentences. Use *if* and, where possible, *shall*.

1. a spy / already has / the letter / I / find it difficult / recover it.
2. the newspapers / definitely write / about the letter / they / see it.
3. the British people / read / about the letter / they / want war.
4. I / send you / a telegram / I / find / the letter.
5. But / I / can't / find it / you / have to prepare for war.

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Interviewer's questions

Choose eight questions to ask Lord Bellinger.

- Why do you think the foreign ruler sent the letter in the first place?
- Were you happy with the way that Mr Hope was looking after the letter?
- What did you think when Mr Hope first told you that the letter was missing?
- Why didn't you talk to the police about the missing letter?
- What made you decide to let Mr Holmes take the case?
- How could you trust Mr Holmes to keep the secret?
- Did you do anything else besides asking Mr Holmes?
- How would you describe your relationship with Mr Hope before the incident?
- Did your relationship with him change at all during the incident?
- How worried were you that Britain would go to war?

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The room was silent for several minutes as Holmes thought about the problem. At last he spoke.

‘I now need to know more about this letter,’ he said. ‘What was in it? Why has its disappearance worried you so much? Why is getting it back so important?’

It was the Prime Minister who answered. ‘All I can tell you, Mr Holmes, is that the letter is in a long, thin, pale-blue envelope,’ he said. ‘There is a large, red, wax seal on the envelope and it is addressed to Mr Trelawney Hope. I cannot tell you anything about the contents of the letter. Please use your famous powers of **deduction**, and if you can find an envelope which matches this description, you will have done a great thing for your country. You do not need to know what the letter says, and I cannot tell you. That is a diplomatic secret which I cannot share with you.’

Holmes stood up and smiled at our visitors. ‘You are two of the busiest men in the country,’ he said, ‘and I am busy too. I cannot help you with this problem, and I shall waste your time and my own time if we talk any more. I’m sorry.’

Lord Bellinger got up quickly. It was obvious that he was used to **having his own way**. ‘Mr Holmes—’ he began angrily. For a moment, I thought that there was going to be an unpleasant disagreement. Then he continued, more quietly, ‘Well, we must accept your request to know what the letter is about. Please sit down again and listen to me.’

‘You can trust us with your secret,’ Holmes said. ‘We are **men of honour**.’

‘I told you earlier that the letter was written by the ruler of a foreign country,’ the Prime Minister said. ‘Recently this ruler has been worried by our **policy** in parts of our **empire**. His worry was unnecessary – our policy is not a danger to him or his country. But he suddenly became very angry about our policy and he wrote the letter to our government in anger. He did not consult his own ministers about it. Even now, they know nothing about his action. And now, the ruler himself is calmer. He understands that writing the letter was not a good idea. I believe that he wants us to **pretend** that it never existed. That is why no one else must ever see it.’

Holmes held up his hand and Lord Bellinger paused. Holmes wrote something on a small piece of paper and passed it to him.

‘Yes, Mr Holmes,’ the Prime Minister said. ‘You are right. That is the name of the ruler I am talking about. His letter contained **shocking accusations** about this country. If it is made public, there will be great anger here against his country. We will soon be at war with them. It will cost us millions of pounds and it will cost us thousands of men – young men who will be killed.’

‘So this ruler doesn’t want the letter to be made public, and our government doesn’t want it to be made public,’ Holmes said. ‘Who does want the letter to be made public?’

‘There are two alliances – groups of countries – in Europe who are fierce **rivals**, Mr Holmes,’ Lord Bellinger replied. ‘I’m sure you know that. If Britain is at war with one of them, that will be greatly **to the advantage** of the other. Do you understand me?’

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Trelawney Hope, who had been quiet, **groaned** in despair at these words. The Prime Minister put his hand on the younger man's shoulder. 'It is not your fault,' he said kindly. 'You acted with honour and you acted with care.'

Perhaps this was true, but Trelawney Hope's career would be **ruined** if we could not recover the letter. The news that he had lost the document would create a scandal.

'The facts are simple, then,' Holmes said. 'If we cannot get this document back soon, there will be a European war.'

'That's the truth, Mr Holmes,' Lord Bellinger replied. 'What will you do? The government will pay you any amount of money that you need. And what do you advise me to do?'

'It is obvious that someone in the Minister's household took the letter,' Holmes replied. Trelawney Hope started to say again that he trusted his servants completely, but Holmes stopped him.

'Your bedroom is on the second floor of your house,' Holmes went on. 'No one could get into the *room* directly from outside the house. No stranger could get into the house without being seen by a member of your household. So, someone in the house took the letter. He or she must have given it to one of the international spies who live and work in London. I can think of only three spies who might have it. I will begin by finding out if any of them has left the country suddenly, last night or this morning. The person who has it won't post it. They'll take it personally to where it can cause the most trouble. It is probably too late for us to get the letter back. I will do my best for you, but I must advise you, Lord Bellinger, to get ready for war.'

Glossary

deduction the process of finding something out by considering the information or evidence that you have

have your own way to be allowed to have or do what you want

man of honour someone who always behaves in a morally correct way

policy a set of plans or actions agreed on by a government, political party, business or other group

empire a number of countries ruled by one person or government

pretend to behave in a particular way because you want someone to believe that something is true when it is not

shocking something that is shocking makes you feel extremely surprised or upset

accusation a claim that someone has done something illegal or wrong

rival a person, team or business that competes with one another

to be to the advantage of (to be to someone's advantage) to make someone more likely to succeed

groaned (to groan) to make a long low sound, for example, because you are in pain or unhappy

ruined (to ruin something) to destroy or severely damage something