

## The Terror of Blue John Gap by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Part 2

**Author:** Ceri Jones

**Level:** Advanced

**Age:** Young adults / Adults

**Aims:** In this lesson the students will:

1. remember and retell the first part of the story;
2. listen to the second part of the story, recount the main events and predict what might happen next;
3. listen in detail to a short extract and look at the effect of repetition and stress on the narrative;
4. discuss the main character's mistakes and write a short advice sheet for hikers planning to enter the caves.

**Materials:** one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (full audio for Part 2) and Track 2 (short extract) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of full transcript per student

**Summary:** The story is set in the Peak District (an upland area in the county of Derbyshire, England) in 1902. It tells the story of how a man uncovers the truth behind the legend of a mysterious monster. It is told in six parts. In Part 2 of the story, Hardcastle decides to explore the caves at Blue John Gap.

### Warmer

**Aims:** to recall Part 1 of the story; to discuss the narrator's motives; to predict some of the events in Part 2

1. Ask your students to work in pairs or small groups to retell Part 1 of the story in as much detail as possible.

2. As the students are retelling the story, write these questions on the board:

- Why do you think Hardcastle wants to explore the Blue John cave?
- Is it curiosity? Does he think the monster may actually exist? Or does he want to prove to Armitage that it doesn't?
- What equipment would you take with you if you were going to explore an underground cave?

3. Ask the students to retell the first part of the story as a whole class. Remember to ask them to describe the sound that Hardcastle heard coming from the mouth of the cave, then discuss the questions on the board. You may want them to do this in pairs, small groups or as a whole class.

### Activity 1

**Aims:** to practise extensive listening; to discuss the events of the story; to predict what might happen next

1. Write these questions on the board:

- How many times did Hardcastle enter the cave?
- What was different about the last visit?
- What did he see on the muddy floor?
- What situation does he find himself in at the end? How did he get into that situation?

Ask the students to listen to Track 1 (full audio for Part 2) and answer the questions.

**Key:** *several times; He saw some sheep's wool smeared with blood; a huge mark; He is lost underground, in complete darkness. He fell into the river and his matches got wet so he can't light his candles.*

2. Ask the students to compare their answers to the questions and to think about what will happen next. You may want to use these questions to help shape their discussion:

- Do you think Hardcastle will get out of the caves? If so, how will he do it?
- Will someone come to his rescue? If so, who?

3. Ask the students to report back on their discussion to the whole class. Ask each student to write a short summary of what they think is going to happen next. You may want to keep these for Part 3.

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### Part 2

#### Activity 2

**Aims:** to practise intensive listening; to raise awareness of the function of sentence stress

1. Ask the students to look at the extract on the worksheet and to find three words that are repeated twice.

**Key:** *impossible, darkness, utterly*

Then ask them what effect this repetition has on the description.

**Key:** *(suggested answer) It underlines the hopelessness of Hardcastle's situation.*

2. Ask the students to listen to the extract and underline the main stress in each sentence. Play Track 2 (short extract). You might want to do the first sentence together as an example.

**Key:**

But I very soon realized how impossible it was. In that black, velvety darkness one lost all one's bearings in an instant. Before I had made a dozen paces, I was utterly bewildered as to my whereabouts. The rippling of the stream, which was the one sound audible, showed me where it lay, but the moment that I left its bank I was utterly lost. The idea of finding my way back in absolute darkness through that limestone labyrinth was clearly an impossible one.

3. Field answers from the students. Listen to Track 2 again if necessary to check the answers. Stop the recording after each sentence and check. Ask the students to think about how the use of stress adds to the description.

**Key:** *It makes it more dramatic.*

4. Ask the students to listen one more time and read the extract in time with the narrator, echoing the stresses and intonation. Alternatively, ask them to read the passage out loud to each other, making it as dramatic as possible.

#### Activity 3

**Aims:** to discuss the main character's mistakes; to write a short advice sheet

1. Ask the students to work in small groups to brainstorm answers to the question: *What could Hardcastle have done to avoid finding himself in the situation he is in at the end of Part 2?*

If the students are struggling you can write the following prompts on the board:

- Did anyone know where he had gone?
- What equipment had he taken with him?
- Did he mark his route in any way?
- How exactly did he fall?

2. Collect suggestions from the class and draw up a list on the board.

**Key:** *(possible answer) He could have told someone where he was going. He could have kept his matches in a waterproof container. He could have taken a torch of some sort – maybe a lantern or an oil lamp. He should have marked his way on the wall. He shouldn't have stood on the rock in the middle of the stream without testing it first.*

3. Ask the students to write a short text offering advice to people who are going to explore the caves. They can use the prompt on the worksheet to help them.

4. Ask the students to share and compare their advice and then invite them to talk about any hiking experiences they have had.

#### Follow-up tasks

1. Give the students a copy of the full transcript and ask them to read it and add to the summary they started for Part 1.

2. Webquest: Ask students to find websites which feature one of the following:

- Advice for hikers
- Recent news stories featuring hikers

They can share and discuss what they found in the next lesson.

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#### Activity 1

Listen to the story and answer the questions.

- How many times did Hardcastle enter the cave?
- What was different about the last visit?
- What did he see on the muddy floor?
- What situation does he find himself in at the end? How did he get into that situation?

#### Activity 2

a. Look at the extract and find three words that are repeated twice.

But I very soon realized how impossible it was. In that black, velvety darkness one lost all one's bearings in an instant. Before I had made a dozen paces, I was utterly bewildered as to my whereabouts. The rippling of the stream, which was the one sound audible, showed me where it lay, but the moment that I left its bank I was utterly lost. The idea of finding my way back in absolute darkness through that limestone labyrinth was clearly an impossible one.

b. Listen to the extract and underline the main stresses in each sentence.

#### Activity 3

a. Brainstorm answers to the question:

What could Hardcastle have done to avoid finding himself in the situation he is in at the end of Part 2?

b. Complete the advice sheet with advice for hikers who are planning on exploring the caves.

#### Advice for hikers

If you are planning an expedition into the caves, remember:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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## Part 2

**April 20.** In the last three days I have made several expeditions to the Blue John Gap, and have even penetrated some short distance, but my bicycle lantern is so small and weak that I dare not trust myself very far. I shall do the thing more systematically. I have heard no sound at all, and could almost believe that I had been the victim of some hallucination suggested, perhaps, by Armitage's conversation. Of course, the whole idea is absurd, and yet I must confess that those bushes at the entrance of the cave do present an appearance as if some heavy creature had forced its way through them. I begin to be keenly interested. I have said nothing to the Miss Allertons, for they are quite superstitious enough already, but I have bought some candles, and mean to investigate for myself.

I observed this morning that among the numerous tufts of sheep's wool which lay among the bushes near the cavern there was one which was smeared with blood. Of course, my reason tells me that if sheep wander into such rocky places they are likely to injure themselves, and yet somehow that splash of crimson gave me a sudden shock, and for a moment I found myself shrinking back in horror from the old Roman arch. A **fetid** breath seemed to ooze from the black depths into which I peered. Could it indeed be possible that some nameless thing, some dreadful presence, was lurking **down yonder**? I should have been incapable of such feelings in the days of my strength, but one grows more nervous and fanciful when one's health is shaken.

For the moment I weakened in my resolution, and was ready to leave the secret of the old mine, if one exists, for ever unsolved. But tonight my interest has returned and my nerves grown more steady. Tomorrow I trust that I shall have gone more deeply into this matter.

**April 22.** Let me try and set down as accurately as I can my extraordinary experience of yesterday. I started in the afternoon, and made my way to the Blue John Gap. I confess that my misgivings returned as I gazed into its depths, and I wished that I had brought a companion to share my exploration. Finally, with a return of resolution, I lit my candle, pushed my way through the briars, and descended into the rocky shaft.

It went down at an acute angle for some fifty feet, the floor being covered with broken stone. **Thence** there extended a long, straight passage cut in the solid rock. I am no geologist, but the lining of this corridor was certainly of some harder material than limestone, for there were points where I could actually see the tool-marks which the old miners had left in their excavation, as fresh as if they had been done yesterday. Down this strange, old-world corridor I stumbled, my feeble flame throwing a dim circle of light around me, which made the shadows beyond the more threatening and obscure. Finally, I came to a spot where the Roman tunnel opened into a water-worn cavern – a huge hall, hung with long white icicles of lime deposit. From this central chamber I could dimly perceive that a number of passages worn by the subterranean streams wound away into

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the depths of the earth. I was standing there wondering whether I had better return, or whether I dare venture farther into this dangerous labyrinth, when my eyes fell upon something at my feet which strongly arrested my attention.

The greater part of the floor of the cavern was covered with boulders of rock or with hard incrustations of lime, but at this particular point there had been a drip from the distant roof, which had left a patch of soft mud. In the very centre of this there was a huge mark – an ill-defined blotch, deep, broad and irregular, as if a great boulder had fallen upon it. No loose stone lay near, however, nor was there anything to account for the impression. It was far too large to be caused by any possible animal, and besides, there was only the one, and the patch of mud was of such a size that no reasonable stride could have covered it. As I rose from the examination of that singular mark and then looked round into the black shadows which hemmed me in, I must confess that I felt for a moment a most unpleasant sinking of my heart, and that, do what I could, the candle trembled in my outstretched hand.

I soon recovered my nerve, however, when I reflected how absurd it was to associate so huge and shapeless a mark with the track of any known animal. Even an elephant could not have produced it. I determined, therefore, that I would not be scared by vague and senseless fears from carrying out my exploration. Before proceeding, I took good note of a curious rock formation in the wall by which I could recognize the entrance of the Roman tunnel. The precaution was very necessary, for the great cave, so far as I could see it, was intersected by passages. Having made sure of my position, and reassured myself by examining my spare candles and my matches, I advanced slowly over the rocky and uneven surface of the cavern.

And now I come to the point where I met with such sudden and desperate disaster. A stream, some twenty feet broad, ran across my path, and I walked for some little distance along the bank to find a spot where I could cross **dry-shod**. Finally, I came to a place where a single flat boulder lay near the centre, which I could reach in a stride. As it chanced, however, the rock had been cut away and made top-heavy by the rush of the stream, so that it tilted over as I landed on it and shot me into the ice-cold water. My candle went out, and I found myself floundering about in utter and absolute darkness.

I staggered to my feet again, more amused than alarmed by my adventure. The candle had fallen from my hand, and was lost in the stream, but I had two others in my pocket, so that it was of no importance. I got one of them ready, and drew out my box of matches to light it. Only then did I realize my position. The box had been soaked in my fall into the river. It was impossible to strike the matches.

A cold hand seemed to close round my heart as I realized my position. The darkness was opaque and horrible. It was so utter, one put one's hand up to one's face as if to press off something solid. I stood still, and by an effort I steadied

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myself. I tried to reconstruct in my mind a map of the floor of the cavern as I had last seen it. **Alas!** the bearings which had impressed themselves upon my mind were high on the wall, and not to be found by touch. Still, I remembered in a general way how the sides were situated, and I hoped that by groping my way along them I should at last come to the opening of the Roman tunnel. Moving very slowly, and continually striking against the rocks, I set out on this desperate quest.

But I very soon realized how impossible it was. In that black, velvety darkness one lost all one's bearings in an instant. Before I had made a dozen paces, I was utterly bewildered as to my whereabouts. The rippling of the stream, which was the one sound audible, showed me where it lay, but the moment that I left its bank I was utterly lost. The idea of finding my way back in absolute darkness through that limestone labyrinth was clearly an impossible one.

Track 2

### Glossary

**fetid** (formal) bad-smelling

**down yonder** (old-fashioned) below

**thence** (old-fashioned) from there

**dry-shod** (old-fashioned) without getting my feet wet

**Alas!** (old-fashioned exclamation) unfortunately