The story
Sherlock Holmes, the great detective, and his assistant Dr Watson, go to the south-west of England to investigate the death of a racehorse trainer and the disappearance of the famous racehorse Silver Blaze. Silver Blaze is due to run in the Wessex Cup, and is the favourite to win the race. John Straker, the dead man, had been his trainer.

The two men discover that the night before the death and disappearance, the boy who slept in the stable with the horses had been drugged – somebody had put opium into his food. Later that night, the trainer, John Straker, was found dead on the moor, not far from the stable. There were tracks on the moor around where the body was found – including the tracks of Silver Blaze.

There is no sign of who may have killed Straker, but Holmes and Watson manage to follow Silver Blaze’s tracks. They lead to another stable. Silas Brown, the owner of another horse due to run in the Wessex Cup has Silver Blaze in his stable – he wants to stop it running in the race so that his own horse will win. Holmes asks Brown to keep Silver Blaze, but warns him that he must bring the horse to the racecourse so that it can run in the Wessex Cup. However, Holmes is sure that Brown merely found Silver Blaze wandering on the moor and he does not suspect him of the murder.

On the day of the Wessex Cup, Silver Blaze runs and wins, and Holmes is able to tell the true story. It was Straker himself who had drugged the stable boy, and he had then taken Silver Blaze out onto the moor. He wanted to cut a tendon in the horse’s back leg so that it would not run quite so fast. Straker needed money, and he was being paid to stop the favourite from winning the race.

However things had gone wrong for Straker. When he took out his knife and tried to cut the horse’s leg, Silver Blaze had kicked out – and killed him.

Background to the story
The background to the story is the world of horseracing which, in Holmes’s time, as it is today, is a sport which derives much of its popularity from the betting that accompanies it. Because so much money is involved it is perhaps not surprising that crimes – even murders – are sometimes committed in order to affect the result of races.

Before Reading
Here are some ways to help your students approach the story:
1. Give students the title of the book and show them the picture on the cover. Ask them to try and guess what kind of the story it is.
2. Give students a copy of the text on the back cover of the book, and of the story introduction on the first page. When they have read the texts, ask them a few questions about the story, or use the Before Reading Activities in the back of each Bookworm.
3. Use the pre-reading activity in this worksheet.
4. If there is a recording of this title, play the first few pages and stop at an interesting point.
Sherlock Holmes and the Sport of Kings

Pre-reading activity

Match the words with the pictures

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1. Just past the tree, they found the trainer. He was dead.
2. Holmes began to look at all the tracks in the mud.
3. ‘Where is Silver Blaze?’ the newspapers asked.
4. ‘His nose is in front, yes, yes, he’s going to do it!’
5. The Inspector opened a box and put things on a table.
6. There are four horses in the training stables, and three boys working for Straker.
7. On the train Holmes told us the story behind the mystery.
8. Holmes put the horseshoe next to the tracks. ‘Yes, that’s Silver Blaze.’
9. ‘It wasn’t me, Inspector, it wasn’t me!’ said Fitzroy Simpson.
10. Edith ran past the man to the stables.

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To the teacher

**Aim:** To familiarize students with the setting.

**Time:** 10–20 minutes

**Organization:** Give one copy of the worksheet to each student or each group of students. Check through the words and explain any unknown meanings. Alternatively, the students could look up any difficult words in their dictionaries. Then ask them to match the words with the pictures. When everyone has finished, discuss the answers with the class. Give no indication as to whether the students have guessed correctly or not.

**Key:** 1c, 2f, 3j, 4a, 5i, 6e, 7b, 8h, 9d, 10g
Sherlock Holmes and the Sport of Kings

While reading activity

Get it right

That evening, Straker locked the stables at nine o’clock, but he left a boy to look after the horses. A few hours later, Edith took dinner to the stable boy. It was a hot soup. She met a man near the stables, and he wanted to give her some money, but she ran away.

The stranger also talked to the stable boy, but when the boy came back with a horse, the man disappeared.

At one o’clock in the morning John Straker got up. He told his wife that he wanted to look around. When she woke up the next morning Straker was not there.

They discovered that the stable was locked, and that Ned, the stable boy was dead. But Straker and Silver Blaze were not there.

They found Straker a few hundred metres from the stable. He had a long cut on his arm and he was dead. There was a small knife in his hand and he had a red and black hat – the stranger’s hat.

They also found the horse’s tracks in the mud, near Straker’s body.

The police discovered that the stranger was a man called Ned Hunter. He was a betting man and he went to the stable because he wanted to ask some questions. He had a big walking stick and there was a lot of blood on his clothes.

To the teacher

Where: At the end of Chapter 2
Aim: To help the students with summarizing
Time: 10–15 minutes
Organization: Give each student, or group of students a copy of the summary. Tell them to read the summary carefully and write the corrections. Later they can write their own versions of subsequent chapters containing mistakes for other students to correct.
Key: A possible corrected summary would be: That evening, Straker locked the stables at nine o’clock, but he left a boy to look after the horses. A few minutes later, Edith took some dinner to the stable boy. It was a hot curry. She met a man near the stables, and he wanted to give her some money, but she ran away.

The stranger also talked to the stable boy, but when the boy came back with a dog, the man disappeared.

At one o’clock in the morning John Straker got up. He told his wife that he wanted to look around. When she woke up the next morning Straker was not there.

They discovered that the stable was unlocked, and that the stable boy was asleep. But Straker and Silver Blaze were not there.

They found Straker a few hundred metres from the stable. He had a long cut on his leg and he was dead. There was a small knife in his hand and he had a red and black scarf – the stranger’s scarf.

They also found the horse’s tracks in the mud, near Straker’s body.

The police discovered that the stranger was a man called Fitzroy Simpson. He was a betting man and he went to the stable because he wanted to ask some questions. He had a big walking stick and there was no blood on his clothes.
**Charactercrosswords**

Make character crosswords for these characters.

- ALWAYS
- WITH HOLMES
- CAREFUL
- A DOCTOR
- ASKS
- STUPID QUESTIONS
- HELPS
- HOLMES
- THINKS SLOWLY

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**To the teacher**

**Aim:** To revise some of the characters in the stories.

**Time:** 15–20 minutes

**Organization:** Give each student, or group of students, a copy of the worksheet. Ask them to add as much information as possible in the spaces around the names.