

SHERLOCK BONES

AND THE
SEA-CREATURE
FEATURE

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Recommended for 6–9-year-olds

Summary

Hi there, I'm Sherlock Bones – I'm a tawny frogmouth skeleton (really) AND a mystery-solving superstar!

With my trusty partners, clever Watts and sassy Grace, I'm here to solve the mystery of the monster in the museum.

And we have a new sidekick, but he can be tricky to keep track of.

Join us for another super-fun adventure as we seek out the monster and save the museum.

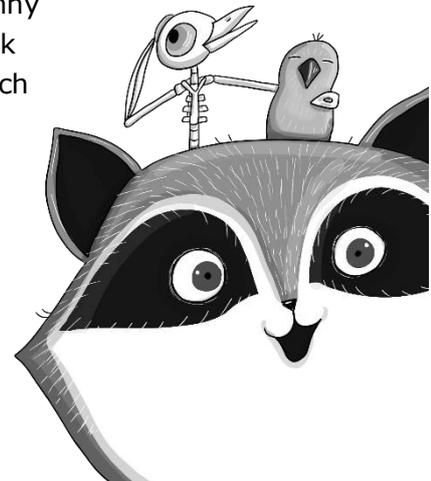
You might not be able to hear Watts, because she's technically a stuffed parrot, but I always know what she's thinking.

And right now she's thinking: Can we solve the mystery of the monster in the museum?

Author style

Sherlock Bones and the Sea Creature Feature 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 Tim Burton).

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



Use in the curriculum

In the classroom, apart from hilarious enjoyment of the book in private reading time, it is also 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' and visual gags

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

Themes

- mystery • humour • graphic novel • natural history •

Classroom discussion and application

Before reading

Before showing the class a copy of *Sherlock Bones and the Sea Creature Feature*, ask students if they have ever visited a natural history museum. Encourage a short discussion about what sort of exhibits you might expect to find there – from huge dinosaur skeletons to tiny little insects. Now show the cover of the book and ask the following questions:

- Can you think of another Sherlock that is very famous?
- Why do you think the character riding the bird might have the name Sherlock Bones?
- What sort of story do you think this might be – funny, sad, a mystery, an adventure? What on the cover made you think it would be that sort of story?

Now open to the double-page spread of the outside of the museum at the beginning of the book and point out the major exhibits in the State Natural History Museum where Sherlock Bones lives. Point out the dinosaur, gemstone, bird and cultural exhibits. Now turn the conversation around to museums that display ecosystems – communities of living organisms (plants, animals and microbes) in a particular area, such as a rainforest or desert. Now ask students what they might expect to find in the Reef to Shore display.



Comprehension Questions

Opening

- Why were Bones, Watts and Grace in the box of maps? (p 12)
- Would you describe Watts as a chatterbox? Give an example from the book that demonstrates your answer.
- What is the newest wing and exhibit in the State Natural History Museum? (pp 27–29)
- Name three things that the map shows are featured in the Reef to Shore exhibit. (p 29)

Extension Question: What is a living habitat and how do you think it might save endangered animals?

Chapter 1

- What two things would Calvin have liked to have seen in the Reef to Shore display? (pp 43–45)
- What drawer does Watts live in? (p 50)
- Who does Bones believe was 'squid-napped'? (p 56)
- What does Grace think she must have to be able to go on a monster hunt? (p 61)
- Why do you think Bones is excited about going on a monster hunt?

Chapter 2

- Describe the shortcut that Sherlock and Watts take to the Reef to Shore exhibit. (pp 66–69)
- What creature do they fly around on their way to the Reef to Shore exhibit? (pp 68–69)
- What is a cryptozoologist? (p 71)
- Name four monsters that cryptozoologists study. (p 73)
- Everyone thinks Sherlock Bones is a g _ _ _ _ (p 75)



Chapter 3

- What does Grace find in the Museum Director's office? (p 77)
- Grace is convinced that it is a mini-treasure chest full of c _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ (p 78)
- What is it about the Chupacabra that makes it 'super creepy'? (p 84)
- Why don't Sherlock Bones and Watts need to worry too much about the Chupacabra? (p 86)
- What colour do bower birds love collecting? (p 90)

Chapter 4

- What are some of the things Sherlock Bones and Watts discover in the touch tank? [Look very closely at the illustrations to find all of them] (pp 100–101)
- Why does the Octopus think its name is Nivlac? (p 115)
- What is Nivlac's special 'thing'? (p 120)

Chapter 5

- Name seven facts about Nivlac (and octopuses in general) (p 130)
- Why do you think Bones expected the clownfish to be a lot funnier? (p 133)
- What does Bones find in the octopus tank to convince him the missing octopus mystery isn't solved at all? (p 137)
- What does Sherlock Bones expect will lead him to the monster? (p 145)

Characters

Draw four columns in your workbook and head each column with a name of a character in the book: Sherlock Bones, Watts, Grace and Nivlac. Now list as many adjectives as you can to describe each character. When finished, write a paragraph about who was your favourite character in the book and why you choose them.

Plot Resolution

In your own words, explain who was scaring the school kids and who the real swamp monster was.

Visual Literacy

Illustrations can show the passage of time by repeating the same image but changing one or two features slightly. Look at page 237 to see an example of this with the pygmy sloth in the mangrove. Now turn to Chapter 12 and find another example where the illustrator has shown a whole day pass in only three illustration strips.



Class Discussion

Watch the following video about pygmy sloths <https://thekidshouldseethis.com/post/the-pygmy-sloths-of-isla-escudo-de-veraguas> and discuss in class why these creatures might be endangered and what can be done to help them survive.

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.

In the words of the author

'Sherlock Bones 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.

'Prior to moving to Australia, I spent many hours sketching in a specimen room at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. This room was full of cabinets and drawers with every kind of taxidermic specimen you could imagine. It is magical to open a drawer full of stuffed birds, lined up in a row, with tiny tags attached to their feet – they were lovely and delicate. It is from these memories that I created Watts, and I imagine this is exactly how Bones feels when he opens Watts' drawer in his museum.

'I was brainstorming quirky characters for this second story around the same time that my 9-year-old son became interested in spelling and pronouncing our names backwards. My name backwards is Ééner, which made him cry with laughter, but we both found his backwards name, Nivlac, really catchy and I wanted to use it in my new story. We were discussing how that could happen when I realised that my new character mis-reads a nametag through the glass on his enclosure. It seems fitting to include my son in this story as he offers lots of suggestions, comments and critiques on my work whether I want it or not.

'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* (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.'

– **RenéeTremI**



About the author

Renée TremI is the author and illustrator of several successful picture books for very young readers, including *Once I Heard a Little Wombat*, *Sleep Tight*, *Platypup* and *Wombat Big, Puggle Small*. She is also the creator of the highly engaging and funny junior fiction graphic novel *Sherlock Bones and the Natural History Mystery*. Renee has a degree in environmental science and has a passionate love of natural history.