

The Terror of Blue John Gap

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Part 1

Author: Ceri Jones

Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. briefly discuss the topic of legendary monsters;
2. listen to a short extract to familiarize themselves with the narrator's voice and pace;
3. listen to the first part of the story, discuss the events and act out a short conversation;
4. listen in detail to a short descriptive passage and discuss the importance of sounds in creating atmosphere.

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (short extract), Track 2 (full audio for Part 1) and Track 3 (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. Part 1 introduces us to the narrator and we first hear of the legend of the Blue John Gap.

Warmer

Aim: to engage students' interest in the topic

1. Explain that you are going to be listening to a story about a legendary monster. Ask your students to think of any legendary monsters they know, or similar legends in their country or area. You may want to elicit the legends of the Loch Ness monster, the Yeti or Big Foot. (If you have a data projector you could show supposed images of these three mythical monsters.)
2. Ask the students to discuss what they know about them, whether they believe in them or not, and why people do or don't believe.

Key:

The following narrative was found among the papers of Dr. James Hardcastle, who died of phthisis on February 4th, 1908, at 36, Upper Coventry Flats, South Kensington. Those who knew him best, while refusing to express an opinion upon this particular statement, are unanimous in asserting that he was a man of a sober

and scientific turn of mind, absolutely devoid of imagination, and most unlikely to invent any abnormal series of events.

Activity 1

Aims: to introduce the background to the story; to familiarize students with the narrator's voice and pace; to give practice in chunking and pausing

1. Play Track 1 (short extract) and ask the students what they learn about the main character in the story.

Key: *He's dead. He died of natural causes. He was a serious, scientific man who didn't usually make up stories.*

2. Give the students a copy of the worksheet and point out Activity 1. Tell them that all the commas have been removed from the extract. Ask them to read the extract and write in any missing commas.

3. Play Track 1 again so students can check their answers. Check the answers. You may want to ask students to check in pairs first before checking with the whole class. Ask

The Terror of Blue John Gap by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Part 1

students how they knew where the commas went, and how the narrator's voice helped them check.

Key: The narrator pauses at each comma.

4. Ask the students to listen again, reading the script along with the narrator in a whisper. Then ask them to repeat the exercise a second time, this time chorusing the script as a class.

Activity 2

Aims: to practise extensive listening and note-taking; to discuss the events in the story; to act out a scene from the story

1. Write the following list on the board:

1. the story teller
2. the area
3. Blue John and the Blue John Gap

Ask students to listen to the first part of the story and make notes about what they learn about the three topics. There is space to make notes on the worksheet. Play Track 2 (full audio for Part 1).

Key: 1. **The story teller** has come to the farm for rest, as he has been ill with tuberculosis. He is curious and adventurous (he goes exploring in the caves). He has a somewhat patronising attitude towards 'countrymen', who he believes to be ridiculously superstitious. 2. **The area** is picturesque and hilly. There are many caves. 3. **Blue John** is a rare and beautiful purple mineral. The Romans discovered it in the valley and built a mine to extract it, the opening of which is called **Blue John Gap**. It is potentially dangerous to go exploring there.

2. Ask the students to compare their answers to the questions in stage 1. As they compare, write these questions on the board:

- What did Hardcastle and the farmer, Armitage, talk about?
- In what way are their reactions and beliefs different?

Key: Hardcastle and Armitage talk about the Terror of Blue John Cave. Armitage believes there is a creature living in the cave and

is frightened of it. Hardcastle, being of 'a rational and scientific turn of mind', doesn't believe the creature exists. He confidently provides rational explanations for everything he hears about the creature.

3. Ask the students to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups and then feed back to the whole class.

4. Point out the extracts from the conversation between the two men in Activity 2b on the worksheet. Ask the students to read them and decide whose words are being reported, Armitage's or Hardcastle's.

Key: 1. A; 2. H; 3. A; 4. A; 5. H; 6. A

5. Check students' answers and then ask them:

- What was the story teller's initial reaction to Armitage's tale?
- What made him think again?

Key: Hardcastle's initial reaction was extreme scepticism. The sound is so extraordinary that it makes him think again. He still refuses to believe Armitage's tale, but he can't yet find any other explanation for the noise.

6. Ask the students to work in pairs and act out the conversation between the two men. Alternatively, ask them to write out the conversation and then read it to the class.

Activity 3

Aims: to practise listening for detail; to raise awareness of sounds in creating a description

1. Write the following words on the board: boom, crash, whine, whinnying. Check their meaning with the students.

Key: boom – a deep sound that continues for some time; crash – a loud noise like the sound of two hard objects hitting each other; whine – a high-pitched, complaining sound, like that of an animal in pain; whinnying – the sound a horse makes when it calls out to another horse

2. Ask the students to listen to the description of the sound that came from the cave and listen for the words. Ask them

The Terror of Blue John Gap by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Part 1

to answer the question: Which words best describe the sound that Hardcastle heard? Play Track 3 (short extract).

Key: *whine and whinnying*

3. Ask the students to look at the words again. Ask them to practise saying them, paying special attention to the vowel sounds. In what way does the sound of the words help us understand the noise Hardcastle heard?

Key: *The vowel sounds in the words reflect the actual sound being described.*

Follow-up tasks

1. Give the students a copy of the full transcript and ask them to read it and write a short summary.
2. Webquest: Ask students to find out as much as they can about one of the following:
 - Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
 - North-west Derbyshire and the Peak District
 - Blue John Stone

Students should prepare and give a presentation to the class on their chosen topic.

The Terror of Blue John Gap

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Part 1

Activity 1

Look at the extract and write in the missing commas.

The following narrative was found among the papers of Dr. James Hardcastle who died of phthisis on February 4th 1908 at 36 Upper Coventry Flats South Kensington. Those who knew him best while refusing to express an opinion upon this particular statement are unanimous in asserting that he was a man of a sober and scientific turn of mind absolutely devoid of imagination and most unlikely to invent any abnormal series of events.

Activity 2

a. Listen and make notes about:

1. the story teller
2. the area
3. Blue John and the Blue John Gap

b. Whose words are being reported, Hardcastle's (H) or Armitage's (A)?

1. From time to time sheep have been missing from the fields, carried bodily away.
2. They could have wandered away of their own accord and disappeared among the mountains.
3. On one occasion a pool of blood had been found, and some tufts of wool.
4. The nights upon which sheep disappeared were invariably very dark, cloudy nights with no moon.
5. Those were the nights which a commonplace sheep-stealer would naturally choose for his work.
6. He had actually heard the Creature – indeed ... anyone could hear it who remained long enough at the Gap.

The Terror of Blue John Gap

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Part 1

Track 1

Transcript and glossary

The following narrative was found among the papers of Dr. James Hardcastle, who died of **phthisis** on February 4th, 1908, at 36, Upper Coventry Flats, South Kensington. Those who knew him best, while refusing to express an opinion upon this particular statement, are unanimous in asserting that he was a man of a sober and scientific turn of mind, absolutely devoid of imagination, and most unlikely to invent any abnormal series of events. The paper was contained in an envelope, which was **docketed**, 'A Short Account of the Circumstances which occurred near Miss Allerton's Farm in North-West Derbyshire in the Spring of Last Year.' The envelope was sealed, and on the other side was written in pencil

DEAR SEATON, –

'It may interest, and perhaps pain you, to know that the incredulity with which you met my story has prevented me from ever opening my mouth upon the subject again. I leave this record after my death, and perhaps strangers may be found to have more confidence in me than my friend.'

Inquiry has failed to elicit who this Seaton may have been. I may add that the visit of the deceased to Allerton's Farm, and the general nature of the alarm there, apart from his particular explanation, have been absolutely established. With this foreword I append his account exactly as he left it. It is in the form of a diary, some entries in which have been expanded, while a few have been erased.

April 17. Already I feel the benefit of this wonderful upland air. The farm of the Allertons lies fourteen hundred and twenty feet above sea-level, so it may well be a bracing climate. Beyond the usual morning cough I have very little discomfort, and, what with the fresh milk and the home-grown mutton, I have every chance of putting on weight. I think Saunderson will be pleased.

The two Miss Allertons are charmingly quaint and kind, two dear little hard-working old maids, who are ready to lavish all the heart which might have gone out to husband and to children upon an invalid stranger. Truly, the old maid is a most useful person, one of the reserve forces of the community. They talk of the superfluous woman, but what would the poor superfluous man do without her kindly presence? By the way, in their simplicity they very quickly let out the reason why Saunderson recommended their farm. The Professor **rose from the ranks** himself, and I believe that in his youth he was not above scaring crows in these very fields.

It is a most lonely spot, and the walks are picturesque in the extreme. The farm consists of grazing land lying at the bottom of an irregular valley. On each side are the fantastic limestone hills, formed of rock so soft that you can break it away with your hands. All this country is hollow. Could you strike it with some gigantic hammer it would boom like a drum, or possibly cave in altogether and expose some huge subterranean sea. A great sea there must surely be, for on all sides the streams run into the mountain itself, never to reappear. There are gaps

The Terror of Blue John Gap

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Part 1

everywhere amid the rocks, and when you pass through them you find yourself in great caverns, which wind down into the bowels of the earth. I have a small bicycle lamp, and it is a perpetual joy to me to carry it into these weird solitudes, and to see the wonderful silver and black effect when I throw its light upon the stalactites which drape the lofty roofs. Shut off the lamp, and you are in the blackest darkness. Turn it on, and it is a scene from the **Arabian Nights**.

But there is one of these strange openings in the earth which has a special interest, for it is the handiwork, not of nature, but of man. I had never heard of Blue John when I came to these parts. It is the name given to a peculiar mineral of a beautiful purple shade, which is only found at one or two places in the world. It is so rare that an ordinary vase of Blue John would be valued at a great price. The Romans, with that extraordinary instinct of theirs, discovered that it was to be found in this valley, and sank a horizontal shaft deep into the mountain side. The opening of their mine has been called Blue John Gap, a clean-cut arch in the rock, the mouth all overgrown with bushes. It is a goodly passage which the Roman miners have cut, and it intersects some of the great water-worn caves, so that if you enter Blue John Gap you would do well to mark your steps and to have a good store of candles, or you may never make your way back to the daylight again. I have not yet gone deeply into it, but this very day I stood at the mouth of the arched tunnel, and peering down into the black recesses beyond, I vowed that when my health returned I would devote some holiday to exploring those mysterious depths and finding out for myself how far the Romans had penetrated into the Derbyshire hills.

Strange how superstitious these countrymen are! I should have thought better of young Armitage, for he is a man of some education and character, and a very fine fellow for his station in life. I was standing at the Blue John Gap when he came across the field to me.

‘Well, doctor,’ said he, ‘you’re not afraid, anyhow.’

‘Afraid!’ I answered. ‘Afraid of what?’

‘Of it,’ said he, with a jerk of his thumb towards the black vault, ‘of the Terror that lives in the Blue John Cave.’

How absurdly easy it is for a legend to arise in a lonely countryside! I examined him as to the reasons for his weird belief. It seems that from time to time sheep have been missing from the fields, carried bodily away, according to Armitage. That they could have wandered away of their own accord and disappeared among the mountains was an explanation to which he would not listen. On one occasion a pool of blood had been found, and some tufts of wool. That also, I pointed out, could be explained in a perfectly natural way. Further, the nights upon which sheep disappeared were invariably very dark, cloudy nights with no moon. This I met with the obvious retort that those were the nights which a commonplace sheep-stealer would naturally choose for his work. On one occasion a gap had been made in a wall, and some of the stones scattered

The Terror of Blue John Gap

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Part 1

for a considerable distance. Human agency again, in my opinion.

Finally, Armitage clinched all his arguments by telling me that he had actually heard the Creature – indeed, that anyone could hear it who remained long enough at the Gap. It was a distant roaring of an immense volume. I could not but smile at this, knowing, as I do, the strange reverberations which come out of an underground water system running amid the chasms of a limestone formation. My incredulity annoyed Armitage so that he turned and left me with some abruptness.

And now comes the queer point about the whole business. I was still standing near the mouth of the cave turning over in my mind the various statements of Armitage, and reflecting how readily they could be explained away, when suddenly, from the depth of the tunnel beside me, there issued a most extraordinary sound. How shall I describe it? First of all, it seemed to be a great distance away, far down in the bowels of the earth. Secondly, in spite of this suggestion of distance, it was very loud. Lastly, it was not a boom, nor a crash, such as one would associate with falling water or tumbling rock, but it was a high whine, tremulous and vibrating, almost like the whinnying of a horse. It was certainly a most remarkable experience, and one which for a moment, I must admit, gave a new significance to Armitage's words. I waited by the Blue John Gap for half an hour or more, but there was no return of the sound, so at last I wandered back to the farmhouse, rather mystified by what had occurred. Decidedly I shall explore that cavern when my strength is restored. Of course, Armitage's explanation is too absurd for discussion, and yet that sound was certainly very strange. It still rings in my ears as I write.

Track 3

Glossary

phthisis (Greek) tuberculosis

docketed (old-fashioned) had the title

the Arabian Nights a collection of middle-eastern folk tales

rose from the ranks (idiomatic expression) came from this area